

The Rise of the Enterprise Influencer



Mo Bunnell

Build deeper relationships to create a "relationship advantage"



Andrew Devlin

Win more and bigger deals with your personal brand



Shimon Abouzaglo

Value engineering for shorter sales cycles AND bigger deals

 **Boost Win Rate**

SPRING 2024 | ISSUE #1



Boost Win Rate

*Personal branding
is the career currency
of the future... start
building your brand today!*





WE MAKE IT PAINLESS TO BUILD TRUST & BECOME AN ENTERPRISE INFLUENCER

People buy from people they trust

With decades-long experience working with enterprise sales and marketing leaders, we know how to grow your audience and build trust in the most effective way.

OUR SERVICES

- ▶ Share your unique point of view (POV)
- ▶ Connect with key accounts through podcasting
- ▶ Build your personal brand

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Boost Win Rate is a print-only magazine for Enterprise Sales Leaders. We interview experts and practitioners, share their insights, and distill their secrets.

Our goal is to tackle Enterprise Sales challenges, uncover trends, and highlight frameworks to future-proof your success and help you win more & bigger deals.

Submit questions & suggestions or subscribe for future issues (published every quarter and distributed to 5,000+ Enterprise Sales Leaders) on BoostWinRate.com



Letter from the editor

Konstantinos
Papakonstantinou

The Rise of the Enterprise Influencer



We all hear about influencers a lot (too much?). That's why I was skeptical about titling our inaugural issue with the "influencer" theme. However, hate the term or not, it's been making waves. Influencers are gaining an ever increasing piece of the value pie. Some are becoming creator-operators and build entire businesses in the back of their following. Others are leaving good-paying jobs to host a podcast or run a newsletter. And who expected a B2B marketing newsletter to have investors... or a COO?

But this is mostly for consumer products, right? Wrong! B2B is often a few steps behind B2C and this time is no different. But B2B personal brands are already sprouting all over the place. Now is the time to get on the wagon. If we've learned anything from B2C influencers it's that there's a distinct first-mover advantage. The social media algorithms reward those who do it right, and those who do it first. (In this issue, we uncover ways to do both, in the enterprise B2B space.)

If you see a LinkedIn influencer with 100,000 followers, good luck competing with them. Conversely, if you're hiring for a sales leader, wouldn't you want that person on your team? They come with a built-in distribution channel!

Now, I'm often hearing how personal brands of AEs and Sales VPs are responsible for promotions, getting a new job, standing out at a meeting, getting recognized at a conference, and winning the deal!

You might dismiss this as anecdotal evidence or that it only happens for small deals. Wrong again!

For the large multi-million dollar deals, senior sales leaders are leveraging their personal brand and social selling to build a groundswell of support within large organizations. They quickly build rapport with buyers, and they have already won - even before the finalist meeting - because for large deals trust plays a deciding role more than ever.

And to be clear, enterprise influencers are NOT influencers in the typical sense. They actually influence results! They are networkers, connectors, and curious educators. They don't know everything, but they seek out experts who can share a unique perspective on industry trends, challenges, and opportunities. They do so because they are genuinely curious but also to help their audience get access to experts without having to do the legwork.

Then, they share what they learn by telling stories, sharing their point of view, and putting the spotlight on experts in their network. THAT's how they become trusted advisors.



Win more and bigger deals with your personal brand

Interview with

Andrew Devlin

Executive Brand Strategist at Boost Win Rate (“The Win Rate Guy”), the agency that helps Enterprise AEs and Sales VPs share their Point Of View (POV) and educate buyers, host an industry podcast to connect with high-value clients and partners, and get featured on industry panels.

Andrew has spent 25+ years at the nexus of enterprise sales and video. At the intersection, he found “personal branding” for VPs of Sales at large enterprises. The key insight is that large deals are now won BEFORE the finalist / orals presentations based on the salesperson’s personal brand. Because people buy from people they trust! (especially when big dollar-amounts and careers are on the line). The best way to start building trust is by sharing your POV, educating buyers, and simplifying their buying journey.

Q: What’s the big deal with personal branding?
It seems like everywhere you turn these days there’s another branding expert waiting in the corner...

It’s true there’s been an explosion of so-called personal brand experts. I believe by latest count there’s over 4,000 “branding strategists” on LinkedIn. The vast majority are freelancers or small operations that pivoted from their prior agency work to help startups with selling on LinkedIn.

LinkedIn sales has gone through multiple evolutions already. Many agencies quickly crop up to adapt to the changes. It used to be that you'd send connection requests and then try to convert connections to clients.

Initially, people were doing this manually. But soon, agencies came up to optimize the process, and then automation platforms were developed to scale the process. The result is that we're all getting inundated with connection requests and LinkedIn message campaigns that end up sounding exactly the same. The smarter operations now are combining AI with multiple touch points to give the illusion that you're engaging with a human. But everyone can tell what's going on (they're not fooling anyone).

Sales can be a numbers game for some... and relationship-building for others.

Some people think that this automation is brilliant and it saves them tons of time. But the most successful sales executives I know stay away from such automation. Sales can be a numbers game for some... and relationship-building for others.

I ascribe to the latter approach. You don't reach a level of success and you don't scale through automation but by building strong relationships and delivering impeccable service.

So how can you connect with buyers on a more personal level? How can you stand out? By providing value in the buyer journey, by educating on industry trends, and sharing your industry POV.

Buyers these days do extensive research and want to know who they're talking to. Especially when it comes to large deals, they want to know they can trust the person at the other end of the table. It's very helpful to put a face to a name. Even more so, to know how that person has dealt with clients in the past, and how they've handled challenges

or what they did when things went wrong.

The only way to build this level of trust is through short videos that communicate your personal brand. That's why personal branding is quickly becoming THE way to sell. Startups have already embraced it, and some enterprise salespeople are getting on board, but we're definitely lagging.

Q: Since personal branding is moving from a "nice to have" to a "necessary to sell," why aren't more people getting on the bandwagon?

I've seen first-hand that personal branding can have a huge impact on senior salespeople's careers and success. Yet it's still a new concept and very few do it right.

Some are too impatient and create videos that are too ego-centric instead of buyer-centric. Others give up if they don't close big deals directly attributed to personal branding within 3 months. And many just don't feel comfortable getting on camera.

They believe they've done fine so far without it, so why change now?

But that's a big mistake, because they're going to be left behind! Personal branding is one of those things that compounds on itself. If you start now, you'll be leaps and bounds ahead of your competition a year from now. It will be very difficult for someone to catch up because of how social networking and the social algorithms work.

Enterprise salespeople believe they've done fine so far without it, so why change now?

So the biggest hurdle holding enterprise salespeople back is that most agencies are focused on startup executives that want to make a splash on LinkedIn. Whereas for enterprise sales executives, they may need to take a different approach to personal brand building.

Also, it's difficult to commit to an agency because

of the associated costs, lack of specialization, and commoditization of the service.

Today, agencies want quick profits and scale so they go by the numbers. Gone are the days of service quality and results.

Today, agencies want quick profits and scale so they go by the numbers. Gone are the days of quality service and results.

It's very difficult to find an outfit that's been working with senior executives for decades and thus has a deep understanding of the goals and challenges involved. Or one that cares as much about your brand as you do. Or that's creative enough in its approach to support your brand in many different ways.

That's why I joined BoostWinRate.com (BWR) - because we do things differently.

Q: How do you take your clients' personal brand building to the next level and stand out from competing services?

A good example is the content types that we help our clients create. All agencies take this approach: we'll interview you and create clips from your videos for your social. And that's a fine start, but ultimately it doesn't get you where you want to go.

We take a much more hands-on, strategic, and multi-pronged approach:

First, we have extensive experience helping you get comfortable on camera.

Second, we do SEO-type research to identify topics you should discuss that already resonate with your audience. It takes a bit more work, but why reinvent the wheel of what content actually works?

And third, we mix things up to boost your brand:

- ▶ one month we may focus on sharing your POV and your take on industry trends
- ▶ another we may invite you to a panel with other industry leaders
- ▶ another we may publish your best ideas in our magazine that reaches 10,000 sales leaders
- ▶ or we may invite you to one of our monthly sales-idea dinners for networking

Q: So what's the biggest hurdle that's holding back most salespeople?

I'm sure this comes as no surprise to anyone. The reason more salespeople don't build a personal brand in a way that can literally change the trajectory of their careers is that they don't feel comfortable on camera. And that's because a) they were never coached properly, and b) they don't know what topics to discuss.

There's just a few simple tips and tricks that can really elevate your on-camera presence. From the very basics of making sure you frame yourself correctly and have a good setup (lighting, background, mic, etc.) to smiling and using your hands. Having a coach double as an interviewer can be a big help!

When you're excited and talk to someone like a friend, it comes across as authentic and engaging.

The next thing to do is to make it interesting! When you're excited and talk to someone like a friend, it comes across as authentic and engaging.

So what are you passionate to talk about? What are the most common questions you get all the time from customers? When have you found yourself adding the most value to clients? How can you educate them and help them benefit from your expertise? What stories can you share

from working with past clients to dealing with tough situations?

Q: For those still skeptical, do you have any words of encouragement?

I'm not going to sit here and tell you it's easy. Anything worth doing takes effort. But having the right support can definitely make a big difference.

This is one of the things that you will initially view as "extra" so working with the right person will make all the difference in order to stick with it and reap the rewards. Once you see it working, it does become much easier because you're 100% sold on it by that point. But getting there won't be easy.

Working with someone who's been in your shoes,

has helped many in your situation achieve the results they wanted, know how to make it engaging and - dare I say fun - can make the experience night and day different from working with anyone else. ■

**I'm not going to sit here
and tell you it's easy.
Anything worth doing
takes effort.**

***I know I'm dreaming,
but personal branding
is the closest I'll ever
get to this.***





Connect with me on

LinkedIn



The future of selling is... social selling

Interview with

Carson Heady

**Managing Director @ Microsoft, best-selling author of the “Birth of a Salesman” series,
and #1 social seller with 40k LinkedIn followers.**

Social selling works, but you have to build your personal brand intentionally in a way that adds value to your audience so they want to connect with you, see you as an authority, and engage with you when the need comes up.

Successful social selling hinges on 2 ideas:

1. Play the odds: don't limit yourself to connecting with the top decision makers but create a groundswell of support by connecting with and engaging hundreds of people in an organization.
2. Whenever you create content, sales should be

the last thing on your mind. Instead, start with the question: “what would my audience ask me, based on my access and experience?”

Q: You're one of the few successful social sellers at the enterprise level. How do you build your personal brand and approach social selling intentionally?

I'm a big believer in probabilities and often take a “swarm” approach when I reach out to a new account. Most people reach out to the 5-10 decision makers and bombard them with messages. I

create a groundswell of support by reaching out to 100-500 people within the company (yes, I've connected with 500 people in one company!).

I don't just reach out to my target buyer. I reach out to others at their level as well as working above and below them, or even in different departments (these days, large complex deals involve stakeholders from multiple departments). That way, when someone mentions my name or I reach out for a meeting, everyone has heard of me and has started seeing my content.

But perhaps even more importantly, I gather a lot of intelligence about the company. Someone may mention that they need to cut costs so I can offer consolidation solutions. Or I can mention their name when I'm speaking with a colleague, share their concerns and challenges, and have a very meaningful conversation.

The more conversations I'm having with different parts of my client's operations the easier it is to open doors and start exploring solutions. But in order to have meaningful conversations, I need information. I need to learn what's important and what's happening within an organization. And what better way to learn than from my network. Which means, I first need to add them to my network and get them to a point where they trust me enough to share meaningful information.

Q: Why is social selling so challenging for most salespeople at the enterprise level, and how did you "wake up" to the opportunity?

I think a lot of times we get in our head that "we've got to go out and create the deal." Well, there is no deal to be had if there's no relationship. And the ones that do happen when there's no relationship, often they're very transactional. So that's not a sustainable long game.

My big a-ha moment with social selling actually came to me several years ago when I lost my job as a result of company-wide layoffs.

I started applying to jobs the old fashioned way: going out to job boards and making posts. I applied to over a thousand jobs in a year, and I was striking out left and right.

I was a very successful sales director in my twenties so I thought I'd waltz right into my next gig... and I was wrong. That's when I realized the power

of a personal brand.

What actually got me my next job was the fact that I had written a book about sales, and that's what made me stand out.

That's when I started to think: you know, these are things that are brand building. Writing books, publishing content, special ways that you can demonstrate that you can help and add value to others.

Q: And social selling starts with personal branding. You're looking to create relationships and figure out ways that you can add value uniquely for everybody that you touch.

Exactly! Which is a big contrast to how people approach social selling even today... I get connection requests and messages listing out everything their company offers. But nobody's going to read or care about these self-serving messages.

Social selling most definitely works, but you have to build your personal brand intentionally.

Even if your recipients do need your services, they don't know or trust you yet. And trust is critical in the B2B space, multiplied by 10x if you're talking about enterprise deals.

So they don't do social selling, they just do selling, and they do it wrong. Then, they go back and lament that social selling doesn't work.

Social selling most definitely works, but you have to build your personal brand intentionally in a way that adds value to your audience so they want to connect with you, see you as an authority, and engage with you when the need comes up.

Q: Can you share an example of how you built a strong relationship through social media that led to a big deal?

The biggest deal I ever closed was in fact as a di-

rect result of social selling. But it wasn't pure luck. I actually reached out to over 500 people at that organization, mostly director level and above.

There were a lot of challenges within that organization. It was in the healthcare space, during the pandemic, with several C-level changes going on. And in the middle of all this, I had to nurture a strong relationship.

It all started by reaching out to the President on LinkedIn. I take a counterintuitive approach to my social selling. My thinking starts with: what's the biggest reason that customers do NOT want to meet with me? And then I call it out!

The feedback we were getting was: "Microsoft is already one of the biggest checks we write. We're not looking to spend more, buy more, pay more" and they would try to funnel us to IT or procurement and get rid of us.

That's what I decided to lean into and think "how can I show up a little bit differently?" So I would call out the investment that they were making. I would say something along the lines of: "I'm part of your account team. It's my job to ensure that you and your team are privy to all the resources that you're entitled to as a result of your significant investment."

Instead of trying to win more work, I focused on improving their ROI and delivering more value. And slowly I connected with enough people by offering value and building trust, until the right time came to expand the relationship.

Q: How do you leverage that "network" power? What do you do once you add people to your network?

So first I'm very intentional with whom I network, and then I try to share insightful content that will make me stay top of mind. A key differentiator is that I never reach out to sell, but to help.

In my position, I get to see how companies are dealing with challenges, I do tons of research and reading, and I attend many events to be up to date with the latest trends and best practices. I also host my own podcast, which gives me access to high-level talent and their thinking. So I take all that activity and distill it in order to add value to my buyers.

Whenever I create content, sales is the last thing

on my mind. Instead, I start with the question: "what's something really interesting I learned today and my audience would care about," or "what would my audience ask me, based on my access and experience?"

That's how I build my personal brand on LinkedIn, which makes people want to stay in touch with me, which in turn exposes them to even more of my content. So that if and when they need something from me, they immediately know whom to ask and don't need to start researching or reaching out to their network.

I want them to know that a) they can trust that I will help them, and b) I'm the expert in my field that can guide them to a solution.

Q: So how do you accomplish that? What type of content are you posting on LinkedIn? What's working best for you these days?

There's no exact science to it, but at a high level two things that work really well are:

1. Connecting and commenting
2. Hosting your own podcast

If you want to forge a relationship with an executive, visit their profile and click the bell' to get notified every time they make a post.

Then, pay attention. What are they talking about? Get a feel for what matters to them. And as soon as you get a notification that they made a new post, try to be one of the first to comment on it. The more thoughtful your comment the better. If you can, tag others who might find the content relevant, so you can start a conversation.

It can surprise you that these small interactions can build a pretty strong relationship. About a year and a half ago I connected with someone and started commenting on their posts. Soon, we were exchanging comments on each other's posts. One day, we were sharing book recommendations. And this person wrote back to me - keep in mind I had never actually spoken physically to this person - "you know, coming from you, this is very high praise."

In a similar situation, the person I engaged with reached out and said to me "any group you're a part of must be a great group." I had established credibility with this person, and yet we had never spoken.

***I know social selling works,
but is Johnson behind
on his quota again?***



Social selling has the power to fast-track superficial acquaintances into meaningful connections built on mutual trust and respect. We're not strangers anymore!

Q: What about hosting your own podcast? How has it helped you with social selling?

I became an accidental podcast host back in early 2020, mostly because I missed sitting around having the water cooler talk, talking about leadership, sales, and culture. But then, I realized I could do that with anybody at any time in the world.

So I started just having conversations with people, publishing them to be thought provoking. Others started calling it a podcast but I was afraid of the commitment it implicated.

But eventually I embraced it from a personal brand perspective. What's been amazing is that I've interviewed customer executives on my show multiple times, who later became clients. The podcast interview was one of our first touch points to start the sale.

Q: How does the relationship transition from podcast to sale?

Once you've had that podcast conversation, it's interesting to see how the sales relationship switches from adversarial to collaborative. The podcast is an amazing tool to start and amplify the relationship. How else are you going to get a stranger to spend 30-45 minutes with you, sharing their beliefs and challenges?

You're talking to someone about things they're passionate about in their life... their principles, their fundamentals. Once that happens, something changes in the dynamic.

Even if you don't jump into a sales conversation right after, you'll notice the change in your social interactions. Whenever they see your post, they will engage in a much more positive way. And if they hear about someone's problem internally - or even when talking to a peer at another company - they will have you in mind and make a recommendation that you're a thought leader in that space. ■



Host a podcast to connect with high-value clients

Interview with

Craig Hewitt

**Founder of Castos (“grow your audience, monetize your content”),
a podcast hosting platform for growth brands.**

Craig founded Castos in December 2016 to give podcasters a better platform with rich analytics and the ability to monetize their audience. Now, Castos is helping brands create and distribute the most impactful podcasts possible. Podcasts are a great way to build your

network, share thought leadership, and create recurring content for your social media. The key to successful corporate podcasting is to pick an almost uncomfortably narrow niche and to have a clear POV that resonates with a core audience (instead of going too broad and generic).

Q: Everyone has noticed the proliferation of corporate podcasts... Why should a B2B company have its own podcast?

For one, podcasting is by far the most effective use of your time, in terms of creating high-quality content. You can talk for 30 minutes and get a dozen pieces of content for your social. These are video clips, making it the most cost-effective way to produce insightful videos.

But perhaps an even better reason for launching a company podcast is this: when you host a podcast, you reach out to and network with a lot of people that wouldn't otherwise talk to you. This is especially true in the B2B space.

Podcasting is super powerful because you build & nurture relationships organically. Yes, you may be reaching out cold to invite someone on your show. But if you start with a handful of "friendlies" in your existing network and do a good job, you should be able to get a bunch of referrals through them.

You can keep building your speaker roster that way and you'll never have to do "cold" outreach. You build relationships where your guests see you as a peer. Then, you nurture those relationships.

Podcasting is super powerful because you build & nurture relationships organically.

When you understand the power of podcasting, you can replace "sales" with "engagement". As long as you keep engaging and adding value, you become a trusted advisor instead of another salesperson banging on their door.

And when the time is right, you should feel comfortable to reach out and ask about co-hosting a webinar, or getting feedback on a new offering, or asking for people in their network who might be a good fit to work with you.

Q: You've seen tons of podcasts hosted on your platform... Do you have any insight into what makes a successful B2B podcast these days?

Successful podcasts have 3 key ingredients:

- ▶ A very well-defined niche and strong POV
- ▶ They record video, which is critical for a more dynamic discussion and audience engagement
- ▶ And they repurpose into short clips across their social media, but also post the video along with the transcript on their blog and SEO-optimize it.

Help your guests look great with short videos on LinkedIn, and that can be a great step to a strong relationship, and a source of referrals.

Video is often overlooked and many podcasts are audio-only, but it's crucial. People used to commute much more, so video wasn't as important. But now, they find podcasts on their desktop. YouTube and Substack have created "podcast" tabs, which is very telling because video podcasting is becoming a key driver for platforms that had nothing to do with podcasting even a year ago.

So even though some guests may not be as comfortable with video, make them comfortable! You can send them a quick checklist with some pointers to look better on camera, and share sample questions in advance to help them feel more prepared. And when you're on the interview call, spend a little time getting to know them and making them comfortable with the whole process.

Help your guests look great with short videos on LinkedIn, and that can be a great step to a strong relationship, and a source of referrals.

Q: Is it better to do an interview-style podcast or to share my own experience and insights?

There's a very strong movement towards interview-based podcasts, especially in the business world. The reason is simple: it takes away some of the pressure to come up with your own great content and to attract a broader audience.

When you interview others, you get to tap into their insights AND their audience. People who search for one of your guests may land on your podcast. Or when you share clips from your interview on social media you can tag your guest and part of their audience is likely to see it.

When people recognize your guest, they're more likely to tune to your podcast even if they don't know you at all. Sometimes that's all you need. Given the proliferation of business podcasting, you just need a chance for someone to listen so they can get hooked by the value you deliver.

Also, interviewing guests recognized in your field has a halo effect on your brand. The more thought leaders you interview, the more people recognize YOU as a thought leader as well.

Besides, interviewing guests doesn't mean you have to stay in the background. You can inject your own insights and experiences in the conversation. The more comfortable you get with podcasting, the more you can experiment with the format and bring more of yourself to the table.

When you interview others, you get to tap into their insights AND their audience.

Q: I imagine it's difficult to build an audience for a business podcast. Is that a problem?

We see all these super popular podcasts with millions of subscribers and video views. But business podcasting works differently, and you have to completely switch your mindset.

So no, you don't need a big audience to see results from podcasting... at all.

By their nature, business podcasts attract a much smaller audience because they're typically not as edgy or entertaining. They appeal to a much smaller niche, but it's a very powerful niche. As long as you have quality content, you will slowly build a quality audience.

But the core value of a business podcast is NOT in the vanity metrics of audience growth, downloads, and views.

Podcasting is first and foremost about building strong relationships with high-value contacts.

When you're interviewing someone, you're expanding your network. Perhaps your guest is an influencer who can bring more listeners to your show. Or they may be a connector who can make introductions to potential customers. Or possibly they could be a potential customer themselves.

Q: I'm sure many salespeople would love to have their prospect join them for a half-hour interview. But why would a prospect agree to that?

It's actually more of a win-win that you might think! Podcasting is first and foremost about building strong relationships with high-value contacts.

From your perspective: inviting a prospect on a podcast is by far the best type of cold outreach. Because you're not selling. You're approaching from a point of power parity. You give them a great experience on your show. Make them look like a rockstar. As long as you accomplish that, you've successfully seeded a potentially strong business relationship.

From the perspective of your guest, they're getting tons of value too. Everyone wants to build



*Reeling in business relationships,
one podcast episode at a time*

their personal brand, share content, and get showcased as an expert. But it's difficult - they don't know where to start, they don't want to figure out the tech, and they don't want to invest in the resources.

You're giving them all that for free AND a venue to expand their brand and gain exposure. All they have to do is show up and you take care of the rest. Producing a podcast isn't without cost and most guests realize that. If you can provide them with video clips after the show that they can post on LinkedIn, or if you post clips and tag them, they get great value from that. Their col-

leagues and the industry see them as experts. And they benefit from the halo effect of your other speakers too. ■

**So no, you don't need
a big audience to see results
from podcasting... at all.**



Turn storytelling into your sales super power

Interview with

Neal Foard

Master storyteller, principal at Storyfire.

Neal has elevated storytelling into a real-life superpower. It's the power to change people's minds. And he'd pick it over any other superpower any day. Forget about super strength or the power of flight or invisibility. Storytelling is the art of persuasion. You could talk your way out of prison, turn your enemies into friends, or convince people to buy from you. Because we KNOW we can change peoples' minds if we say the right words. But we need to make a clear distinction that this is NOT about manipulating your customers or using any shady tactics. Storytelling is rather the art of making sure your message stands out and gets heard.

Q: *I've interviewed many sales people about what works in B2B sales... Why is B2B selling so challenging?*

In my case, I typically get 4-5 pitches a day on LinkedIn or via email. I can't help it but always my first inclination is "don't bother me, get lost!"

Seems harsh, but that's the environment we're in right now. If you reach out cold to someone, they're annoyed from the get-go. You may have crafted the most polite message or spent tons of time to personalize it - it doesn't matter anymore.

Cold messages are such an intrusion. Because it's

so transparently for the benefit of the salesperson sending the message. There's practically nothing in it for you. God forbid you actually engage... that's when the barrage of messages never stops.

Especially now with AI, they bombard you from everywhere. It can start with the innocuous LinkedIn connection request but then you find out you're on a sequence of 10+ touch points - emails, texts, phone calls, voicemails...

When you hear the statistics from experts, it's really infuriating. It takes on average 7 touch points (and up to 12 touch points according to other sales gurus). That means that you've relentlessly subjected your prospect to 7+ messages before you managed to weaken their guard and they gave up. But trust me, that relationship will feel like you're constantly fighting an uphill battle as a salesperson.

That's why you have low win rates, dealing with all the latest automation technologies to stay ahead of the competition, and buyers who don't trust you. B2B sales is increasingly challenging because you're not building relationships, you're treating your buyers transactionally. And they know it.

Q: So what actually works in B2B sales? What should we be doing differently?

Many salespeople are taught that sales is a spray-and-pray numbers game where you target your prospects with a 10-part preloaded gun sequence. In a way, it's similar to attending a networking event and you're just blasting what you do in case anybody cares. The room at the event is worse off by having you there because you're noise. Instead, you should always think: how can I leave the room better off by showing up?

So there are 2 viable paths to B2B sales:

1. B2B sales ought to be a referral game. If you have a happy customer, ask them: is there anybody else you can think of that might benefit from my service? If so, would you be okay making an introduction? Or would you be alright with me reaching out and mentioning that we've worked together and that you thought I could help? That's permission marketing.

2. Start the conversation by sharing your point of view and industry insights through storytelling. Don't make it about yourself, make it about your observations and what you've learned over the

years. Give away your best stuff for free. Think of the consumers of your content as your friends and try to help them. That's personal branding and social selling done right.

Q: The way you're using storytelling on your social media has been extremely powerful. How does it pay off in terms of driving business for you?

When you forget about selling for a minute and try to share what you think your audience will truly find valuable, good things happen. All that organic engagement that you see on my posts means that tens of thousands of people watch my videos. By extension, they get to know me over time. They know my interests and what I stand for. And the more you know someone, the more you trust them.

In my case, buyers often don't even know what I'm offering, but they just want to work with me!

So it's a weird mechanism: you post good content, your audience engages, the social media algorithms notice and expand your reach, and over time more people get to know you. The magic is what happens next: WHEN they need you, they reach out to you. You don't have to pester anyone with cold messages. In my case, buyers often don't even know what I'm offering, but they just want to work with me!

That's a very powerful position from which to start a sales conversation.

Q: You're a masterful storyteller and you have some great stories. But how can the rest of us start using storytelling in a sales context?

You have to forget of it as a sales context to begin with. Your stories should resonate with the right audience, get your audience to engage so they'll keep seeing your videos, and that's how you build

trust and stay top of mind. Over time, your audience will actually seek you out and learn what you're offering. When the time comes, they WILL reach out to you, instead of starting to research for potential vendors.

But in your stories, you don't even have to talk about your own experiences. You can tell stories about other people and companies. By extension, you're demonstrating your values and interests. That can tell a lot about you as a person.

My favorite example is when I heard Brad Pitt tell a story. He was in an interview with Adam Sandler, and he shared his favorite Adam Sandler story.

Adam Sandler was a drama student and his teacher invited him out for a beer so that he could tell him: "son, I don't think you have any future in this. I just can't see it." Years go by and Adam is a huge success and happens to be at an event where he bumps into that same drama teacher. Sandler's response wasn't to gloat or say "See, you were wrong." Instead, he brought over his friends and introduced him likes this: "this was the only teacher to ever buy me a beer!" It was such a gracious and generous thing to do.

This is a powerful story that says something great about Adam Sandler. But I'd argue that it also says something great about Brad Pitt... because he singled out that story to share.

So in your storytelling, you can do the same while building your library of stories. Talk about others that you admire and why you admire them. That will resonate with the right people who share your values.

Q: *Just to connect the dots here, you're saying that when storytelling in sales you shouldn't talk about your company, solution, or features but rather you should tell stories about your customers, their challenges and how they overcame them?*

Yes, the British advertising industry often gets this very right actually. For example, there was this beer, Carling Black Label. You'd never know that their ads are about a beer until the very end. Yet people would watch them because they were fun.

One ad was a squirrel on an obstacle course played to the tune of Mission Impossible. That squirrel is doing the most astonishing acrobatics that defy

physics. Eventually he winds up getting to the bird box with a treasure trove of peanuts. And the ad ends: I bet he drinks Carling Black Label.

In the US, Geico used to run some very funny ads with the tagline "it's so easy, a caveman can do it." It's the same idea.

It's perfectly permissible to talk about your company, but you must do so in a way that improves the commons. The fact that you showed up benefited us all. You left the room a better place. You may say that these examples are B2C but the same works in B2B. Adobe did a great campaign showing the travails of a creative employee getting micromanaged ahead of a big meeting. The Yellow Pages had a very powerful and funny commercial some years back.

**Talk about others
that you admire and why
you admire them.
That will resonate
with the right people
who share your values.**

B2B CAN be fun and CAN tell stories. Sometimes, we treat B2B as though the people at companies stop being human. Your customer is not "a company" but rather a very human buyer.

My advice is for B2B salespeople to take a page from the B2C playbook: treat your buyers like people, share stories, and engage your buyers emotionally.

Q: *So how did YOU become such a great storyteller?*

Like most people who are good at something, I got good over time. It was my profession to explain ideas and tell my clients' stories, so I sought out to get better at it.

How? I studied the greats. I watched videos of the greatest storytellers that I wanted to emulate. I

*The modern-day bard...
selling with stories
(who needs thick pitch
decks when you can
sell with stories?)*



took notes of what they did differently. And I practiced a lot. Just like a stand-up comedian performs the same material night after night... I put in the reps. Here are 3 things I learned through trial and error that can really elevate your storytelling game:

1. Don't make yourself the hero of the story.

Early on, just like everybody else, I would tell the story and I was at the center of the action. Only to discover that the audience wasn't paying as much attention. When you make it about THEM, that's when you 10x the impact of your story.

Today in fact, even if I'm telling a story that happened to me, I'll change perspective and I'm NOT going to say it like I was the person in the story. I'm going to create a fictional character and make them the center of the story. That way you and I both can enjoy the story, rather than me standing on a soapbox and asking you to worship me.

2. A good story needs a great ending.

From my years in advertising, I learned that every concept needs to have an ending, so your audience is left with a powerful punchline. But here's something else I learned:

Just because you've reached the end of the story doesn't mean there's nothing more to say. When I share my stories on LinkedIn and TikTok, they definitely have an ending, but then there's a little quote, a moral to the story to wrap it up in a philosophy. Leaving your audience with some of your own final thoughts will keep your message echoing inside their head for much longer. It's truly powerful.

3. Reframing your story can make it much more compelling.

Sometimes, a story falls flat not because it's not a great story, but rather because it wasn't framed properly. Here's a quick example to drive this home: My kid loves airplanes and my dad was visiting so we thought we'd go by the airport to check out the planes taking off and landing. So I asked my dad "do you want to go see the airplanes at the airport?" to which of course he answered "do you know how many airports and airplanes I've seen already? Too many!"

So then I reframed my question: "do you want to see how Toni reacts to an airplane taking off?" Completely different story, right? ■



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How to build deeper relationships and create a “relationship advantage”

Interview with

Mo Bunnell

Founder and CEO of Bunnell Idea Group (BIG), a training consultancy that specializes in systematizing business development to help companies drive growth in a systematic and predictable way.

To win large deals, you want to build a relationship advantage, which you can do by thinking once a month about your top 10 accounts: what can I do to help them personally and professionally, without any expectation in return or any talk about sales? Being helpful to them helps you because science proves that we buy from people we like. How do you do that? By identifying things

you have in common. And how do you do THAT? By asking thought-provoking questions about their perspective on things - the more you ask and share, the more points of commonality you'll identify, and then you can nurture them.

Q: Cold-calling - and cold outreach in general - can be pretty demoralizing. How can we make sales more fulfilling and effective?

The trick is to flip your mindset from selling to helping. What does that mean? Combine your personal expertise with your company's solution to offer meaningful advice, for free. Give away your best ideas and content. Try to be as helpful as possible, and as fast as possible.

The last part is actually a key point... Let's say you're a training company (like we are). If I'm speaking with a client, I don't want to kick things off with what my training solution can do and why it's the best, because that will be very off-putting.

But what if I flip that and say: Let's just start training now, even though there might be just a couple of decision-makers on the call. I want to SHOW you what I can do, by offering my training for free right away. That way, I give them a taste of the experience.

Here's an analogy to clarify my point: Let's say you're out for a celebratory dinner and you want a nice bottle of red wine. Well, the sommelier could talk for 30 minutes about how great this Bordeaux is, where it's from, all kinds of things. But if they just take 30 seconds and give you a small taste, you're buying that bottle.

That's what you want to do in sales too: don't TALK about the experience and how great your solution is, give them a taste as soon as possible. Don't sell, try to help right away. If your help indeed adds value, then the sale will follow.

Q: You've written the book "The Snowball System" - what's the big idea behind it?

The idea is that business development and sales done in an uber-helpful way - always having the client's best interest in mind - is a learnable skill that you can systematize. The last part being the most important thing: you CAN systematize business development and sales. And in fact, you HAVE to.

A couple of the core elements of the Snowball System are:

- ▶ the give-to-get method, and
- ▶ falling in love with your client's problems.

We talked about the former, which is giving the client a small taste for free to get the sale. So let's talk about the latter.

Almost every vector in your organization is push-

ing you to fall in love with your solutions, your new experts, your new technology, the new release, the new pilot. Everybody's pushing onto you to push to your clients. Well, that's falling in love with YOUR solutions.

A better way is to fall in love with the client's problems. Here's how you do it. First, you want to ask clients really thought provoking questions so you can learn their priorities in their words.

Q: Asking thought-provoking questions sounds very useful. But how do you do that?

You need to design your questions so that it is very clear that you want the person's personal perspective.

The science behind it comes from Dr. Diana Tamir. She found that what makes people's brains light up is when they answer questions only they know, i.e. when they offer their personal perspective. The brain lights up the same way as when you eat great food or drink caffeine.

Don't TALK about the experience and how great your solution is, give them a taste as soon as possible.

So if we can ask questions like: "From your perspective as a global retailing CFO, what do you think is going to happen in the economy over the next 12 months?" we demonstrate that we want - and value - their personal perspective. It's very powerful because it lights up the "pleasure center" in their brain.

THAT's what's going to be the unlock for you to learn your buyers' priorities in their exact words.

Q: In your trainings, you work with a lot of businesses. What's the most common mistake you see?

The biggest problem is that they don't have a system for business development. Think about it: to scale any other operation you have a system. IT has agile, manufacturing has six sigma, account-

ing has GAAP (in the US). Every important business process has a system so that people don't have to reinvent it every time.

Could you imagine if the accountants got together every year and said: "Hey, how are we going to do the audit this year? Look, I got a new idea."

A great deal might make your year. A great relationship can make your entire career.

Well, why do we do that for business development or sales when we should be scaling them in an elite way? Having a common playbook is the number one thing that an organization can do to accelerate sales and create a wonderful buying experience for their clients so that every unit of time that their people invest in it, they get more throughput, more clients, and larger deals.

Q: I've seen in your trainings that it's important to get a buyer to like you. Do you have any tips on that?

People often throw around the phrase "people do business with those that they like." It sounds trite, but the science actually backs it up. Dr. Jerry Berger at Santa Clara University has proven that we buy and say yes to people that we like.

So likeability is important in sales. And what correlates to likeability? In follow-up studies, researchers found that "commonality" was the number one factor that correlates to likeability.

The more questions you ask about what your buyers are excited about and what they're doing, the more chances that you're going to stumble into commonality, which in turn leads to likeability.

Here's a simple example: Say you're out on vacation next month, going on a big African safari with your family. When someone emails you, they will probably get an automated out-of-office note. Don't just say "I'm out this week." Share what you're up to.

You never know who it will resonate with. Somebody might write back: "We've also been thinking about doing that. Can you give us some tips?"

So share specifics of what you're doing and what you're passionate about. And when you stumble into commonality, it's your job to nurture and reinforce it.

Q: A big challenge these days is that all solutions and all pitches start sounding the same. Do you have any advice on how to stand out?

That's a big question: How to escape the commoditization trap? Even when you can't really change your solution, what you CAN control is your positioning.

The best research I've seen on this is by Suzanne Shu in her paper "When three charms but four alarms: identifying the optimal number of claims in persuasion settings."

You want to figure out what three things you can communicate that are unique to you AND align with your clients' priorities. So you better figure out how to ask questions (focusing on their unique perspective) and learn about those priorities, as we discussed above.

You might have 27 differentiating factors or things that you want to convey. Don't do it. Get it down to your top three. What Suzanne Shu found in her research is that as you add more value propositions above three (they tested all the way up to 10), you diminish the power of what we call your key three. You're far better off having just three clear messages. And you want to pick the three that, if your prospects agree that they like those three, you're the only person that owns all three together.

If you can get your message down to three points, it's more believable, memorable, and ownable.

Q: How about deepening client relationships, again to stand out from the more transactional experiences?

Most people approach relationship-building haphazardly. They have a random lunch here, they catch up with people from time to time, and so on. But like everything else, you want to have a system around your relationships.

A one-liner that our clients love is that "a great



Poor Johnson, he fell in love with his client's problems.

deal might make your year. A great relationship can make your entire career.”

You definitely want to focus on relationships and become more intentional with them. Think about it this way. How many organizations have a pipeline review meetings and weekly meetings about their deal flow? All of them. Now, how many companies have weekly meetings about their relationship flow? None!

You want to have a system around that. It's actually more important over the long term than the actual short term deals.

So how do you do it?

1. Write down your top 8-10 of your most important relationships (or up to 20 max). Write those down on a piece of paper and stick it on your wall so you see them all the time.
2. Block off time on your calendar to invest in THEIR success, with no expectation of anything in return. You're not selling anything. You're just letting them know things that might be helpful

to them, making introductions, shipping them a book with some highlighted parts they'd find relevant to their situation. Whatever it is, invest in their success personally and professionally.

How often should you do this? Try for a monthly cadence. So once a month, think about how you can invest in someone else without any expectation of return. And if you do that with that list of people, you'll build out an amazing relationship ecosystem that no one can touch. You've got a relationship advantage. ■

How many companies have weekly meetings about their relationship flow? None!



How value engineering can deliver shorter sales cycles AND bigger deals

Interview with

Shimon Abouzaglo

Global head of customer engagement and business value consulting @ Thales, expert in operationalizing outcome-based selling at scale.

In complex sales, value engineering is taking solution engineering to the next level. It's helping a client understand clearly the value of the solution and how it maps onto the client's specific operational benefits.

Value engineering helps you consider the client's different stakeholders and their objectives so you can address them from the get-go and avoid derailing the deal later. It can result in shorter sales

cycles, larger deals with expanded scope, and higher win rates.

Yet many enterprises still don't implement value engineering. Either because they tried it with junior talent and it didn't work since they lacked the business maturity to help them stand out in the client's eyes, or they couldn't scale it because it requires a mindset shift and more intense training than usual.

Q: What is value engineering?

It's the discipline of articulating the benefits of a solution to the client. It's particularly valuable in a complex sale, where it's easy to get lost in the weeds of needed functionality and features. But how does everything translate into value for the business? Which helps you understand and assess tradeoffs and priorities.

In practice, salespeople usually leverage the help of solution engineers or pre-sales to perform the demo. That's a very important activity. However, the demo can be considerably more effective if there's a value engineer ahead of that demo who interviews the customer, performs a discovery, and learns about their objectives, challenges, and strategy.

When the value story supports the numbers, the client has better clarity and confidence in the solution so the deal doesn't get derailed.

The value engineer can then put together a roadmap of what it takes to help the client successfully go from point A (current state and challenges) to point B (future state and objectives) and achieve their desired business outcomes.

Many people think that it's all about the ROI. But value engineering is more about "how" to achieve the ROI. It's about helping a client with their decision-making process throughout the sales cycle.

When the value story supports the numbers, the client has better clarity and confidence in the solution so the deal doesn't get derailed.

Q: How is value engineering different from what solution engineers are already doing?

It's important to make the distinction between solution and value engineering. Solution engineers

can perform their own discovery, which is typically more functional and technical. The knowledge that needs to be gained is different, so the nature of their questions is different. The goal of the solution engineer is to understand the technical requirements and functionality, so they can tailor the use cases and the demo to the customer.

A value engineer conducts a very different discovery, focusing on the business outcome and figuring out how the solution can deliver on the client's objectives. It's a totally different mindset, but just as important in order to have an effective discovery and demo for the client.

The difference between solution- and value-engineering boils down to feature and function vs value and benefits.

Q: How does value engineering work? What does it look like in practice?

Value engineering is a self-support function, similar to pre-sales, i.e. solution engineering. Based on deal qualifications, a value engineer gets invited - just like a solution engineer - to join the efforts of a specific deal, and they support it throughout the entire buying cycle.

It can also extend to customer success, where value engineering can help by performing what we call value realization, helping customers realize the value that was promised during the sales cycle.

The value engineering function typically involves discovery, interviewing the customer's multiple stakeholders, and producing a "case for change" document. The "case for change" document answers why the client should adopt THIS technology, and why they need to change NOW. It's also called a business case.

This is "direct" value engineering. But there's also an "indirect" component, which is more about building content and training material for the sales organization to be more effective, whether it's opening doors, crafting an effective email sequence, or giving different types of presentations (such as buy versus build, or what is our technology contribution to mergers and acquisitions, etc.).

Q: Can you tell me a little more about the "case for change" document?

Traditionally, we present "the case for change"

right after discovery. We present it to a series of stakeholders, including senior executives, because we do need their buy-in. We need them to understand what they're embarking upon: the good, the bad and the ugly. It's all presented along with the ultimate value they can get out of it.

However, that's not the only way of sharing the case for change. In a very competitive scenario or if a deal stalls, we can differentiate ourselves or reignite a relationship by performing value engineering pro bono to share with them our POV and their case for change, akin to a consulting effort to stand out.

The human brain was not created to absorb everything in one session. It needs reinforcement, it needs repetition, and the training itself needs constant improvement..

Q: What is the impact of value engineering?

Even though there's no easy way to attribute a specific impact to value engineering alone, you can feel the difference it makes on a deal.

From my experience, I can confidently say that value engineering:

- ▶ accelerates the sales cycle,
- ▶ increases the scope on deals (I've found it to be the case on about 1/3 of the deals where value engineering is involved), and
- ▶ brings a much higher close rate.

Q: So why isn't value engineering more common in enterprise sales?

The challenge is that value engineering is an additional activity that requires highly-skilled professionals, so it increases time and cost, even though

in practices it can actually shorten the sales cycle and increase both the win rate and the size of the deal.

Nevertheless, many Sales VPs don't wish to spend more time on discovery. They are very cautious about any activity that might extend the sales cycle. However, I would argue that it's a mistake. The longer you invest in discovery – especially from a value perspective – the SHORTER the sales cycle will be.

If you rush through the discovery process, you will end up facing hurdles at other points of the sales cycle and it won't go as smoothly. Because without value engineering you're not positioned as a true advisor to help your customer in their buying decision throughout the journey.

In sophisticated enterprise sales, any gaps that haven't been addressed through value engineering will increase the uncertainty of the deal and thus create risks later in the sales process. Because you haven't fully considered all of your buyer's personas and objectives, and you haven't demonstrated clearly how you'll help them get there.

Q: For an enterprise that's sold on value engineering, how can they scale value engineering across an organization?

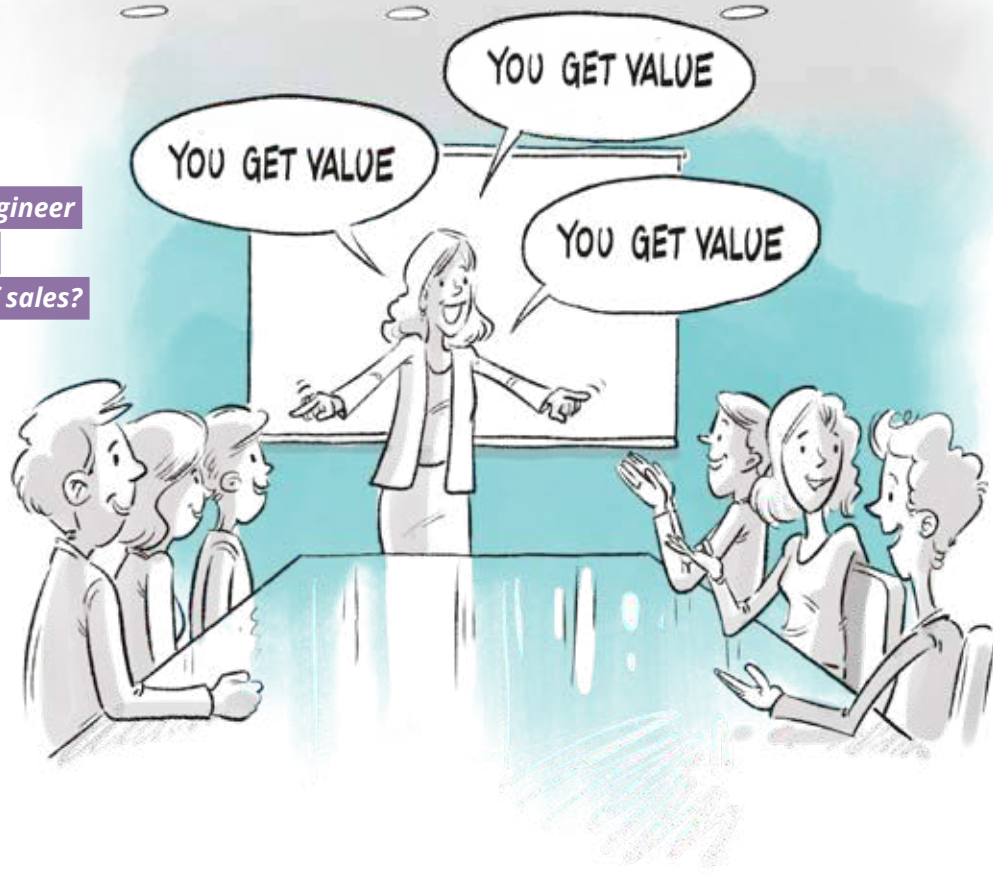
That's a million dollar question...

Some have pursued scalability through the solution engineering team and have largely failed because it's a completely different mindset and there's a tension towards a speedy discovery.

Some have tried to scale by leveraging third party online cloud-based software that creates the "case for change" in a cookie-cutter approach. But obviously it doesn't capture effectively what a human business value consultant would do. That approach showed some promise at first, until it reached saturation. So creating those automated business cases with an ROI and some form of story attached to it has become more of a mechanical part of the process, a checkbox, and it's no longer effective.

And others have gone the training route. But the vast majority of sales leadership have fallen into a trap, imagining the training as a one-time event, which is becoming shorter and shorter. 20 years ago, we used to have five-day training events. Then

Who does
our value engineer
think he is...
the Oprah of sales?



they shrunk to two days. Now, most of them push everything to be conducted in one day, and at the extreme they're condensed into a single hour.

What none of them realize is that the human brain was not created to absorb everything in one session. It needs reinforcement, it needs repetition, and the training itself needs constant improvement. So without all that, if you want to implement value engineering and you're looking into a one-day training event, you might as well skip it.

So what works? You need an intense training effort with lots of one-on-ones, content, and tools. The vast majority of success is gained through shoulder-to-shoulder experience of a salesperson with a business value consultant. Working together on an example that relates directly to a deal that they're working on - making the training come to life - makes a world of difference.

That doesn't necessarily mean spending weeks together. It just means several hours, spent over the course of weeks. That's good enough to start acquiring a new mindset.

Q: What makes a good value engineer versus a bad value engineer?

The first thing that comes to mind is business maturity. Young people with top IQ from top business schools can do a good job, but that's never going to compare to the job performed by someone with more maturity in the business.

It's not just the years of experience but also the breadth of experience in different industries, business models and processes, and software solutions. Without that experience, younger talent tends to create documents and presentations that don't stand out. And if you're not differentiated in value engineering, in 90% of the cases you won't be able to add value to your organization's sales cycle.

That's why many organizations that have tried value engineering have failed or backed off. It's because they didn't invest in the right talent and didn't see the results. Value engineering is a function where you need some level of business mastery in order to deliver differentiated insights that will help the client see you differently. ■

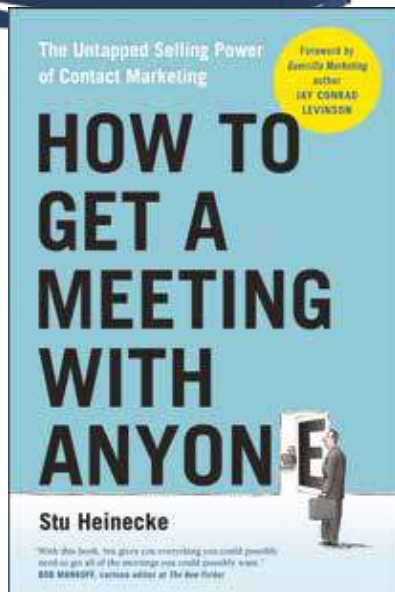


A book worth reading

How to get a meeting with anyone

by Stu Heinecke

Brought to you by SnackableBooks.com



The author of this book is an accomplished Wall Street Journal cartoonist and the father of “contact marketing” (account-based B2B campaigns that yield phenomenal results).

Often, salespeople take a “boil the ocean” approach. They cast a wide net, load the outreach platform with 10 touchpoints, and play the numbers game. The idea is simple: pester 10,000 people until a handful begrudgingly become clients.

Instead of boiling the ocean, Stu recommends this much more targeted and creative approach:

Focus on 20-100 VIP clients who can have a major impact on your business.

Craft a highly personalized message for each of them.

Deliver the message through an intriguing ‘device’, which can be anything from an oversized cartoon print to a sword or a remote-controlled helicopter.

And it works! When Stu started his marketing agency, there were only a dozen or so major clients in the industry that he needed to win over. With a budget of \$100 he produced 24 large



**The perfect example
of contact marketing:
invite event attendees
by your booth
to pick up their
custom bobblehead!**

prints of his cartoons, personalized for each potential client, and mailed them out. That campaign had a near-100% success rate with each client paying up to \$25,000 per engagement!

Even though he spent a lot more per person than any mass campaign, his ROI was astronomical. In the book, Stu shares example after example of 'contact marketing' campaigns by others, all of whom achieved response rates north of 50%.

My favorite example is the one involving bobble heads. A sales person was attending a conference and had a booth like everyone else. But here's what he did differently. Before the event, he emailed 100 of his ideal clients that were planning to attend (he got the email list from the organizers).

Then, he went on LinkedIn, downloaded their photos, and sent them to a bobble-head manufacturer.

Next, he emailed each one with a photo of the bobble head and said: this will be waiting for you at my booth. Come by, I'd love to meet you!

THAT's how you show your creativity, stand out, and WIN the meeting. ■

**Salespeople that take
a "boil the ocean"
approach pester everyone
they can reach.**





Stop losing 38% of your deals to "buyer inaction"

Interview with

Geoff Hendricks

Key account executive at Challenger (researchers, authors, and trainers on the concepts of the Challenger Sale, Challenger Customer, and the Jolt Effect) & podcast host.

The biggest sales mistake is: selling features, ROI, and a better future. The easiest rebuttal is that there's no budget, and the buyer will often prefer to remain in the status quo. Instead, speak to the costs of inaction - leveraging the concept of loss aversion (humans are twice as motivated from loss vs gain) - to go from "how can I afford to do this" to "how can I afford to NOT do this".

Your solution may address a specific problem, but you should figure out a big business pain point

(based on your commercial insight). Don't lead WITH your solution, lead TO your solution.

Q: 38% of buyer journeys end with no decision... Are salespeople doing something wrong in these situations?

A lot of salespeople have been in a favorable environment for too long and got complacent. They're letting buyers do all the heavy lifting: learn about industry trends, the different solutions, and how to evaluate them. But that's A LOT of work. Some-

times it requires skills that your buyers don't necessarily have.

The person tasked with finding a new solution for their company isn't necessarily the end-user or the most appropriate person for the job. So they need a lot of help and hand-holding before they can present a thoughtful decision to their boss. Instead, often (38% of the time to be exact) they come back supporting the status quo: "we're fine with the current way of doing things."

We often overlook the fact that humans tend to be more comfortable in their current state instead of seeking uncertainty for a potentially better future.

Q: So what should salespeople do differently?

First, they need to become guides for their buyers, providing them with all the info and educating them on all the need to know in order to make the right decision. But that's table stakes.

Elite sellers also need to focus on pointing out compelling reasons for their buyers to make a change NOW. If your buyers can kick the can down the road, you will often lose the sale to indecision.

A good example of the shift you need to make is this: when you pitch, instead of focusing on ROI and a better future, shift the focus towards loss aversion. There's clear evidence that we're loss averse creatures, so we're much more likely to buy something to alleviate pain or loss vs buying something to improve our situation in the future.

You want to tell your buyers (convincingly, and with evidence): "You should make a change now because you're hurting yourself. You are losing X dollars in sales TODAY."

Q: Can you give me a real-life example of what fighting indecision looks like?


Let's say you're selling printing services to a school. When you think about a school district, immediately you think you should focus on their budget pressures, right? And let's say your company just came out with a brand new technology for cheaper color printing.

What an average seller will do is to go in and say: "look how much cheaper we are. Wouldn't it be great to be able to offer color printing at your school?"


School administrators will say: "yes, it would be

great, but I just don't have the budget today to upgrade to color printing." When you're selling a brighter future, you should be prepared for indecision and the easy cop-out of "we don't have the budget." What an elite seller will do is speak about the cost of inaction... the fact that learning retention is directly tied to color. "Black and white leads to worse learning retention, and that's going to lead to lower test scores."

This pitch appeals to the school administrator's true pain point of making sure the students perform well because that's what determines the money the school will get from the district. That's a great reason for the administrators to consider making a change. So it goes from: "how can I afford this" to "how can I afford to NOT do this."



Instead of selling on ROI and a better future, shift the focus towards loss aversion.



Because there's a direct consequence of not taking action. That's what sellers need to highlight to their buyers. Not the features or the benefits of their solution, but rather the impact of inaction.

Side-note: this is called a commercial insight. Doing the research to figure out what your buyers truly care about. The school administrator doesn't care about offering color printing capabilities. But they DO care about raising their students' test scores!

Q: What are the key insights behind the Challenger Sale?

In the Challenger Sale, we identified 5 different buckets of salesperson profiles, each with its own percentage of high performers. You have the "hard worker", the "problem solver" and the "relationship builder" - all doing ok but with the lowest mix of high performers inside their buckets. Then you have the "lone wolf" who's doing great but you don't really know how they operate and you can't replicate them. And finally you have

the "challenger" bucket with the highest mix of high-performers. In the book, we share how challengers operate differently:

- ▶ They educate their customers by offering a well-founded and unique perspective about their business and industry.
- ▶ They take control of the sales process early on. Which is often misconstrued as bossing around their client, but that couldn't be further from the truth. They take control because they're professional sales people so they know the sales process, and they want to remove that uncertainty for their clients, who only buy perhaps once a year and aren't familiar with their company's complex and evolving procurement processes.
- ▶ And they create constructive tension: they're willing to ask intelligent, challenging questions. They don't challenge their buyer, but rather how they think about the status quo (going back to tackling indecision).

Q: Can you share some insights from the Challenger Customer?

There's a lot of new stuff in the Challenger Customer but the two concepts I'd highlight as the most insightful are:

1. The concept of "commercial insight," which is different from thought leadership and should be an organizational activity.

A commercial insight is very different from thought leadership or having data and statistics. It's a unique perspective that your company has and your sales people can customize for each client and industry.

But it's not just a call script. It's an arc that can move forward your customers throughout their buyer journey. It boils down to a uniquely deep understanding of your clients' challenges and opportunities.

2. The concept of "buyer verifiers," which adds a whole new layer to qualifying buyers.

A big problem I see with sales teams today is that they often rely too heavily on inbound demand, which turns them effectively into order takers. There, it makes sense to apply traditional frameworks like BANT or MEDDIC.

But when you're out hunting to bring in new logos, these frameworks often fall short. Because they don't take into account the nuances of buyer behavior that signals where they are in their decision process.

Salespeople using these frameworks often fail to consider "what actions are my buyers taking?" In fact, I love to run an exercise where I'll share three different buyer profiles and ask: which of these would you prefer to sell to? Three out of four salespeople will actually pick profiles that have no statistical impact or negative statistical impact on sales because they seem easier.

But what you want to look for is:

- ▶ What language are they using? Is it "I" or "we"? What tense are they using?
- ▶ Are they talking about how the deal will make them look good and help their career?
- ▶ Are they skeptical?

In fact, being skeptical can feel very scary to sellers at first, but it can be a very positive sign because it means that your buyer is taking the deal seriously. Your buyer may be pressure-testing it because they're getting ready to share with other stakeholders and champion it throughout the organization.

Q: Can you tell me a little more about the concept of "commercial insight"? How can a company develop such insights?

A commercial insight starts with research. You ought to be able to look at a client's business, identify the challenges that you commonly solve, and formulate a hypothesis as to the true underlying pain. Your goal is to shift from leading WITH your solution to leading TO your solution.

I'll give you an example. I was working with a company that wanted to pick a sales methodology. Instead of diving into selling them on a methodology, I started with some research and found that they're effectively selling to 3 different customers: the public sector, the government, and the private sector.

So I posed the question: "You have 3 different customers, each with their own sales cycle and approach. How are you thinking about picking the sales methodology that's going to address all 3 of those?" This was effectively me sharing the

commercial insight that different customer types may need a different sales methodology. I knew I struck a chord because I got the buyer to stop and say: "Hmm, that's a good point, I hadn't thought about that."

This opens up an entirely different discussion and positions you as a trusted advisor because offered a new perspective. You changed their thinking and showed that you care to dig deeper instead of jumping straight into sales mode.

Q: What are you seeing as the biggest trends in sales?

I'd say the biggest one is that the days of cold outreach are pretty much long gone. Gone are the days where you'd send a cold email or LinkedIn message with a pitch and you'd get a sale started.

Your prospects are inundated with and tired of such presumptuous messages. So they either never read them because platforms classify your messages as spam, or they simply hit "delete" as soon as they figure out it's a sales message.

Instead, you want to build a relationship. And

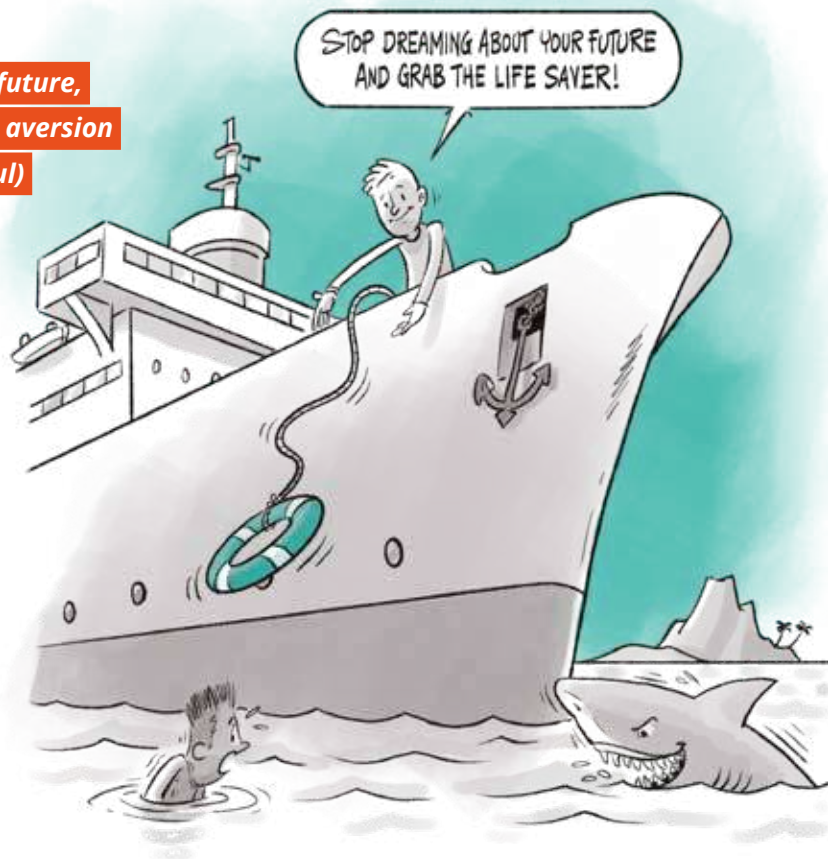
when I say relationship, I don't mean that you have to learn your buyer's pet name or send them a card on their birthday. This is a very common misconception...

Your buyers DO want a relationship with you as the seller. But they don't want a personal relationship. They want an educational relationship. They want to be challenged and learn how to think about their business differently. In a way that gives them a competitive advantage. You can do this by sharing how you're helping other customers and what you're learning from them. By sharing your commercial insights and point of view.

Because remember: when you articulate their deepest challenges, they feel like you truly "get" them but also believe that YOU have the solution.

My journey in B2B sales has taught me the importance of deep customer understanding, challenging the status quo, and aligning sales strategies with broader organizational goals. These insights are not just about closing more deals; they're about fostering lasting, meaningful relationships with clients, driving mutual growth and success. ■

**Don't sell a brighter future,
focus on buyers' loss aversion
(it's twice as powerful)**





Winning large enterprise deals using the “E3” framework

Interview with

Roshan Lulla

SBU Head @ Cognizant. Roshan is a seasoned professional with a remarkable track record of over two decades in the tech industry. He carries a unique combination of skills, having contributed significantly to core tech solutions in Large Pursuits in the IT Services sector and garnered deep domain expertise while closely collaborating with major retail brands, including six of the top 20 in North America. In his current capacity, Roshan serves as the leader of the Strategic Business Unit for Cognizant on the east coast. He plays a pivotal role in working closely with a diverse portfolio of large retailers, and guiding them through the intricacies of cutting-edge technological solutions.

The dynamic world of IT Solutions is ultra competitive because of the high level of talent and the large deal-sizes involved. How can a Pursuit Lead stand out and boost their organization's win rate?

They need to constantly engage their clients to understand their needs and anticipate changing requirements, craft unique solutions to the client's specific needs, and communicate effectively the unique value they've architected for the client. But that's only half the battle. Stay close to your clients, and even closer to your competitors so you can customize your solutions in ways that truly stand out.

Q: What is the role of Pursuit Leads in large enterprise deals?

Pursuit Leads are responsible for building strong relationships with clients, understanding their unique needs, and crafting solutions that align with the clients' overarching business objectives.

Effective Pursuit Leads are distinguished by their ability to provide insightful recommendations that empower clients to achieve their goals while ensuring that the solutions offered are technically sound.

The success of a Pursuit Lead depends on whether they can construct a win-win situation for their Client and their Employers.

Effective Pursuit Leads are distinguished by their ability to provide insightful recommendations that empower clients.

Q: What's the biggest challenge a Pursuit Lead typically faces in multi-million dollar deals?

Almost every large pursuit entails collaboration across multiple departments. This is one of the most significant challenges to overcome. Because

each department has its own mode of operations, while the solution you present to the client needs to have a unique wrapper bringing all the departments' needs together.

Combining exclusive solutions with innovative offerings is a recipe for proving your value and building strong client relationships.

The Pursuit Lead plays a major role in this, by setting clear common goals and objectives, ensuring consistent messaging, encouraging innovation, driving interdepartmental brainstorming, and providing regular feedback and evaluation as the story evolves.

Q: That sounds like a coordination nightmare! How do you approach this challenge?

Through a lot of trial and error, I've come to follow an approach that I call "The E3 Principle." This helps me stay focused on the needs of my pursuit and make sure it stays at the top of the pile. It boils down to these 3 E's:

- 1. Exclusive Solutions with Innovative Offerings**
- 2. Expressive Storytelling**
- 3. Elastic Financial Models**


Q: Let's break them down one by one. Starting with "Exclusive Solutions with Innovative Offerings".

When it comes to serving clients, one size rarely fits all. Every business has unique challenges, goals, and requirements. Therefore, crafting exclusive solutions that meet clients' specific needs is essential. This means taking the time to thoroughly understand a client's needs, objectives, and constraints. All across the different depart-


ments involved. And validating them using deep data analysis.

Ideally, you want to provide insights to clients that they may have ignored. Tailoring solutions in this way not only increases the likelihood of success but also demonstrates a genuine commitment to meeting your client's needs.

But while an Exclusive Solution forms the core of your pursuit, Innovation is a strong driving force in today's rapidly evolving business landscape.



Keeping things simple reflects a unique clarity of thought. That alone can make you stand out.



Where possible, introduce new ideas, approaches, and technologies to better serve your clients. Innovation can take many forms, from adopting cutting-edge technologies to rethinking traditional processes. It allows you to provide clients with solutions that are not only effective but also forward-thinking and capable of adapting to changing circumstances.

Combining exclusive solutions with innovative offerings is a recipe for proving your value and building strong client relationships. Demonstrating your commitment to adding genuine value can be a true competitive edge in this market.

Q: The next element in your framework is Expressive Storytelling...

Expressive storytelling involves packaging information in an engaging manner, while also being concise and relevant. It means addressing key client questions and building trust through clear, well-structured communication.

Think about it this way: You put all this work to create a custom solution and bring innovation to the table. So effective communication to make sure all the work and value come through is critical.

When you use expressive storytelling to communicate, you're not just transmitting data; you're building a bridge of trust. Clients are more likely to trust a message that is well-structured, honest, and delivered with empathy.

You'll be surprised but effective communications is one of the biggest miss, even on big deals. Keeping things simple reflects a unique clarity of thought. That alone can make you stand out.

Q: And the 3rd "E" was Elastic Financial Models

Elastic financial models refers to using financial frameworks that are flexible AND adaptable. For large deals, this is critical.

A flexible financial model can be adjusted or fine-tuned to accommodate technological innovation, investments in new trends, and achieving financial goals. It can adapt to shifts in the economic environment, changes in regulations, or unforeseen events such as market volatility.

Some key characteristics of elastic financial models may include:

- ▶ predictive cash flows,
- ▶ flexible rolling forecasts,
- ▶ dynamic budgeting based on volumes, and
- ▶ gain-share models that link payouts to growth and achievement milestones.

Using elastic financial models gives clients the comfort that the deal won't fall apart due to changing conditions that impact the financial side of the equation.

Q: Even with this framework in mind, what are some pitfalls to watch out for?

To excel beyond the E3 framework, it's imperative to pay close attention to the client's needs, respect and understand your competition, and keep a watchful eye on external factors that could impact your pursuit's success.

Here's what can go wrong:

- ▶ **Not Listening to client needs:** It's a common pitfall to lose sight of the client's specific needs and instead construct your proposal based solely on your organization's strengths and capabilities. To excel in pursuit management, you need a deep

For our buyer journey simulations, management wants us to learn the power of compelling messaging so deals don't stall.



understanding of what truly matters to your client and what factors drive their decision-making. You have to talk to your client and keep engaging them to proactively address any concerns and keep your solution aligned with their requirements.

► **Underestimating Competitors:** This is often overlooked but you should understand your competition almost as well as you understand your own company. Don't neglect to thoroughly analyze your competition, their existing relationships, and their strengths. Missing this can leave you vulnerable.

► **Not Monitoring External Factors:** Successful pursuit management involves more than just looking inward; it requires a keen awareness of external factors. This includes staying informed about changes in client leadership, being attuned to market dynamics that may impact your client's business, and understanding what's making your

client's industry news.

But even if you know the latest frameworks and understand all the pitfalls, you shouldn't be complacent. If there's one thing constant in the IT Solutions market is that it constantly changes. And you need to stay on your toes. Stay close to your clients (and even closer to your competitors), constantly learning about the latest innovations, and working with SMEs to understand how to architect unique solutions. ■

Read more about Pursuit Management and thoughts from Roshan Lulla.





Build strong alliances to win big enterprise deals

Interview with

Ashish Raina

Strategic Alliance Executive @ Pegasystems.

Alliances are critical in winning the biggest deals, but they're very fragile and need to be nurtured properly. You can't be seen as opportunistic. You need to be aligned, engage constantly, and invest in each other's success. Because that's how you build trust. And when you deal with multi-million dollar projects, trust between partners is everything.

This isn't important just for you and your partners, but for your client's peace of mind too. When they see a well-forged partnership, they are more comfortable that things will go smoothly and you'll deliver as promised, so it increases trust with the client.

Q: Why are partnerships critical to enterprise growth?

Now more than ever, we live in an environment where solutions become increasingly complex. Enterprises no longer look for point solutions. Big deals require the collaboration of a number of vendors to deliver a comprehensive offering.

It's not as simple as company A providing a service to company B. It's almost always multiple companies coming together to provide a service or a product. And what clients are looking for are for vendors to come together in a way where the sum is greater than the individual parts.

If you're isolated within this vendor ecosystem, the opportunities for your single-point solution may be limited. Or at the very least you're not exploring the possibilities that open up when you're part of a team with other vendors.

So that's how I look at the role of partnerships and why I believe they're becoming more important every day. Today, if you're looking for best-of-breed solutions, you're looking at consortiums of vendors that are true partners.

Q: How do you pick the right partners and align with them to win deals?

A good starting point is to look at your objectives and then scan the vendor ecosystem to identify who will help you achieve those goals. And then, look for common goals that each partner is trying to achieve.

Primarily, you want to identify partners where the combination of your respective solutions provides enhanced value to clients. And then you have to slowly build a alignment and trust, which is perhaps the greatest risk mitigator in complex deals.

Today, if you're looking for best-of-breed solutions, you're looking at consortiums of vendors that are true partners.

As you build an alliance, you can strengthen it by making mutual investments in training and collateral. And as you work with each other, you learn who can truly enhance your value prop and accelerate bringing your services to the market.

Q: Do you typically start a partnership when you have a deal in hand, or you work on these proactively so you can be ready when the time comes?

It sounds like a good idea to start partnerships proactively, but you want to be careful that they

don't go stale. You don't want to go through the process of aligning and working out the partnership details, but then months go by and you haven't worked on anything together.

So sometimes it can be best to wait for a deal and then initiate a partnership on an accelerated timeline. But ideally you want to limit your risk by making your first deal perhaps a smaller one, just to test things out and forge a stronger relationship in a measured way.

You want to identify partners where the combination of your respective solutions provides enhanced value to clients.

A deal makes a partnership real and gives you extra clarity around key questions such as: what does each partner bring to the table? What is the joint value proposition? And how is it really going to work?

Q: How does it work when a smaller vendor tries to punch above their weight class and wants to partner with a larger vendor?

You might think that a smaller vendor doesn't bring as much value to the table, but I've seen many such partnerships work really well. Keeping these 2 considerations in mind:

1. The small vendor bringing the deal needs to put the client's objectives first and foremost. It shouldn't be driven by their desire to work with a much larger partner to get access to their resources and rolodex. The core of the partnership should be the joint value you can offer to the client. If the value prop is strengthened, that will always resonate even to a much larger vendor partner.
2. When the small vendor is very focused, say in serving a specific industry, they can actually bring

tons of value to the partnership. Large vendors are typically well diversified. But there's often a clear need for niche industry-specific solutions. And a small vendor may be laser focused in one industry, where they're seen as a specialist. So they can bring a lot of subject-matter expertise and credibility along.

A deal makes a partnership real and gives you extra clarity around key questions.

As long as there's special focus and enhanced joint value, an alliance between a small and a large partner can definitely work.

Q: *But how does an alliance compete with a bigger competitor that brings a soup-to-nuts solution, all done in-house, without the obvious risks of a partnership model? (coordinate, trust, etc.)*

That's a very good point. You're right, an alliance-based solution has obvious risks. In which case you have to focus on 2 things for the buyer:

- 1.** Demonstrate that you have a strong partnership in place and highlight past projects you've worked on together and have been a huge success. Or even when problems arose, how you handled them so that the end result was a win for the client.
- 2.** Communicate that you're bringing in a combination of niche experts so you get best-of-breed in every aspect of the solution. The argument you're making is that a soup-to-nuts solution may have some weaknesses. Whereas you're partnering with the best across the field.

These days, this can be a powerful argument for clients who want to be on the cutting edge because technology is moving very fast and they want nimble approaches. The partnership approach is more like a puzzle where each piece represents the best of the best.

Q: *What's the role of the Alliance Manager in all this?*

As you can imagine, getting two or more companies to work together is no easy task because there are different functions in each organization. You can think of the Alliance Manager as the quarterback (in the context of US football).

This can mean getting people across different teams and organizations to communicate effectively, training teams on each other's solutions so they know how to interface for hand-offs, getting sales and marketing to work together, enabling conversations with the client to present the bigger picture (because sales and marketing may not understand the full scope or they may not be in tune with macro industry dynamics) and so on.

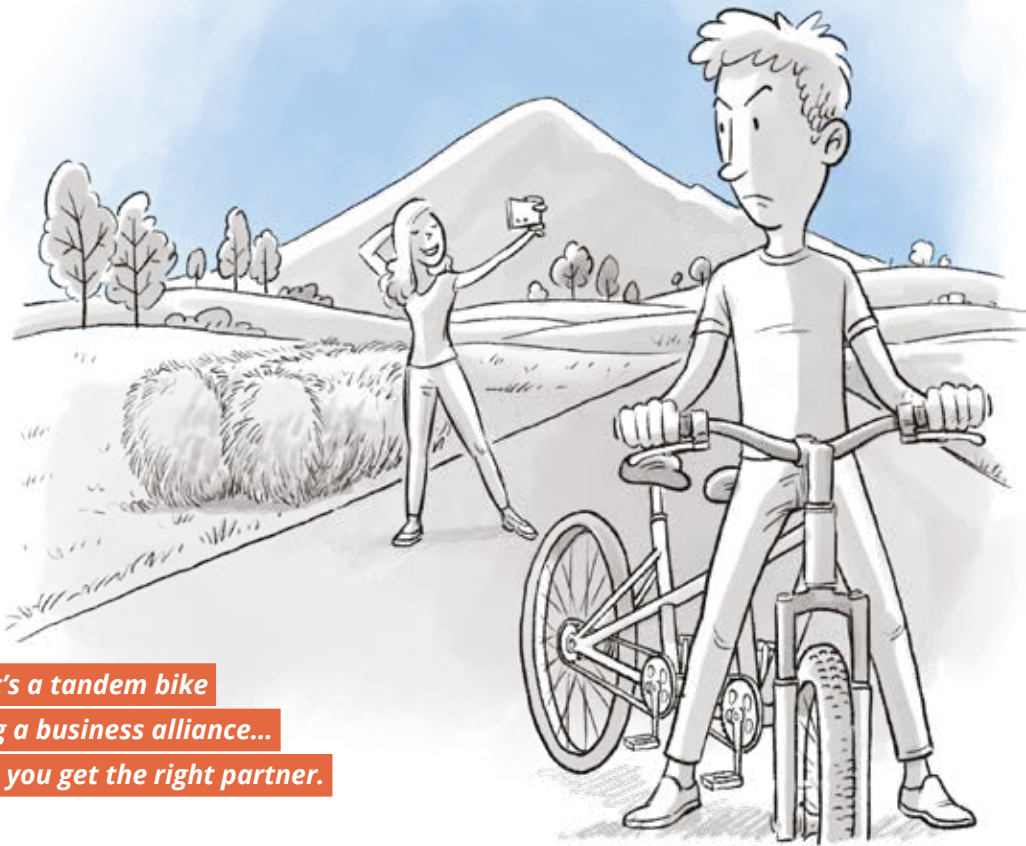
Another big mistake is when you try to be a partner to many companies, waiting to see which way the wind is blowing and picking the winning team.

There are lots of elements that go into making multiple organizations work together in order to deliver a complex solution seamlessly.

Q: *Have you seen any alliances fail?*

One of the most common mistakes is jumping into a partnership too soon. You typically need a deal in hand, and use the first deal as a litmus test to see how you're working together, and really if you're delivering a differentiated value prop that hits the client's objectives.

Another big mistake is when you try to be a partner to many companies, waiting to see which way the wind is blowing and picking the winning team.



**Whether it's a tandem bike
or creating a business alliance...
make sure you get the right partner.**

Let's say I'm an IT Solutions consulting company. I've partnered with different product companies and I'm waiting to see which way the client goes. Then, I present myself as a partner with that product company. But that won't work well for any partnership because I'll be seen as overly opportunistic.

I think it's better to commit yourself and choose your partners as early in the sales cycle as possible. Choose them wisely, with the client's objectives in mind, and who you think will be the best partner for you. That way you're building a true partnership.

Q: So bringing this all full-circle back to win rates, where do alliances fit in?

In the context of large enterprise deals, alliances are becoming increasingly important. Simply because large deals require a team-sport approach from the vendor side. Clients work with large consulting firms that can help with solutioning

and delivery. So these firms need strong partnerships with different products, and the products amongst themselves to make sure they work together as seamlessly as possible.

Strong alliances forged over time that can be put together in a nimble fashion to offer enhanced joint value and deliver on client objectives translates into higher win rates. ■

**The partnership approach
is more like a puzzle where
each piece represents
the best of the best.**



How to use win-loss analysis to boost your win-rate

Interview with

Cam England

**“The Win-Loss Guy”, Sales Team Lead @ Clozd,
a win-loss analysis service and platform.**

Relying on your CRM reports for win-loss analysis can be very misleading because CRM data hygiene is very poor. Instead, if you're serious about learning why you lose deals to competitors or indecision, it's best to interview the buyers on these deals. These interviews can give you unique context to help you identify real areas for improvement.

Q: What is win-loss analysis?

Win-loss analysis is trying to understand why we

win sales opportunities, and what should we do differently to win more.

Many organizations are already doing a version of this, typically in a rudimentary form, by relying on their CRM. At the end of each opportunity, when the salesperson closes it out, there's some sort of pick-list or text-box to provide some level of information from the sales rep's perspective of "why we won/lost this deal." Then, every quarter or so the organization will run a report to try and get some insights from their CRM.

Q: Why do companies need an outside agency to perform their win-loss analysis? What's wrong with the status quo?

Unfortunately, the data you're collecting in your CRM is limited, or even misleading.

If I'm the sales rep and lose a deal, I'm not going to point the finger at myself and say "I dropped the ball because of XYZ." I'll just pick whatever that first loss reason is in the CRM. Typically, I'll just say that we lost because of price or lacking features (that's the easiest way out).

But the sales rep doesn't have the perspective that you care the most about because they didn't make the decision. That's your buyer. You ultimately want to understand: why did the buyer make the decision they did?

So what's a better way to identify areas for improvement to boost your win rate? Get feedback from the buyer. Which you can do either through a survey, or better yet through an interview.

The sales rep doesn't have the perspective that you care the most about because they didn't make the decision.

Q: What are you trying to understand from the buyer that will help your win rate going forward?

You want to add context to their decision. Perhaps your sales rep was directionally right and you lost primarily because of pricing or features. But without context you don't know what was wrong with your pricing or features, so you don't know where or how to improve. You don't know the buyer's priorities.

Or perhaps you didn't lose to the competitors you think you did. That's important because if you think you're losing to competitor ABC, you'll look at what they're doing and you'll try to copy their features or pricing. But what if that's not your real competition

at all? You might be over-indexing on things that don't matter to the buyer at all!

In many cases we actually find that you lost to "no decision." The buyer ended up not going with anyone, and they stayed with the status quo.

Without context you don't know what was wrong with your pricing or features, so you don't know where or how to improve.

And in pretty much all cases it's never just ONE thing that tipped the buyer one way or the other. There's usually 3-5 different factors that contributed to their decision. You will never capture that amount of detail and context within your CRM. And even if you do, you're getting the sales rep's perspective instead of the buyer's, which is what really matters.

Q: How do you get the buyers on a call to interview them? What's in it for them?

We typically reach out and offer buyers either a direct financial incentive (like an Amazon gift card), or make a donation to a charity of their choice.

But there's also another factor that I'd label as professional courtesy. Think about the situation: I'm a buyer and I've just engaged with a sales team over a 3-month evaluation and I decided to move forward with their competitor. I then see an invitation from this neutral third party asking me to participate in a short conversation to understand that buying decision.

There's a bit of professional courtesy where I almost feel like I owe them some explanation. I want to be helpful to them because they put in all this effort and ended up with nothing. I see that they're serious about learning from the process and I want to help them improve their proposal.

The least I can do is spend 20-30 minutes and help them understand what factored into my evaluation. And since it's a third party reaching out, I know that there won't be any pressure or objections to my decision; they're just trying to understand and learn from it.

Q: Can you share an example where such a win-loss analysis made a big difference for a client?

One that comes to mind that I really like is a company in the business intelligence software space. Their CRM report told them that they kept losing against a particular competitor. In response, they were going to dedicate a lot of resources to very specific product builds to make them more effective in head-to-head deals against that competitor.

The last box that they wanted to check before putting all of these plans in motion was to engage with Clozd to perform a number of win-loss interviews in order to verify that this strategy they were putting in place was the right move.

Any unique knowledge and insights that you can bring to the table makes you a valuable resource to the client and can tip the deal in your favor.

We went out and interviewed 30 recently lost opportunities, where in the CRM that particular competitor was labeled as the primary competitor. From those 30 interviews, we found that in 85% of them, the buyer didn't think that was the primary competitor at all.

What happened was that as part of their workflow, sales reps had to pick who's the competitor in each evaluation. That competitor just happened to be the first name in the dropdown, and that was the fastest pick for the sales reps.

For convenience, especially if I don't have a feel

for the competitive landscape, it's really easy just to default to the first option and say I'll come back later to update that once I have more information. Which of course never happens. We all know that CRM hygiene is terribly poor.

So we went back to the client and said: pump the brakes on this strategy revamp. We're talking with your buyers and this competitor isn't coming up. It's just an issue with CRM hygiene.

Q: What are some common areas for improvement that come up in these buyer interviews?

The key reasons that come up all the time are – no surprise here – functionality and pricing.

However, going back to the issue of populating that information in the CRM. If I'm the sales rep, I'll tick "price" as the reason why we lost the deal. That's true to a degree, but there's a lot of nuance that gets missed.

When you have a conversation with the buyer, you can try to understand: was it actually just the sticker price, or was it the contract terms, or how the cost would evolve at scale as you grow your business after year one?

With a better understanding of the true issue, you can start to come up with solutions on how to become more competitive. So price can be an umbrella term but you can really get into the nitty gritty to expose some very interesting specifics about what it was about price that had an impact on the buying decision.

Q: From the information you collect, do you have any advice for salespeople to help them boost their win rate, outside of product features and pricing that perhaps they can't impact directly?

Features and pricing can easily get copied, in which case it comes down to the sales rep's performance. And there are 2 key areas where a sales rep can stand out.

1. Multi-threading
2. Knowledge and expertise

When it comes to a B2B sales motion, the idea of "multi-threading" is: how well did I navigate the rest of the organization and get other people on board to work with me.

When the buyer is looking at two solutions and both tick the boxes in terms of functionality and pricing, what becomes important is how well did that sales rep engage with the right people?

Sales reps really shoot themselves in the foot when they find that ONE person that they think is going to be their champion - their white knight - only to find out later that another vendor did a much more effective job at networking and getting the right (multiple) people on board.

It's often a matter of mapping the solution and the problems that it solves to the problems that other stakeholders of that organization are feeling. That can often be the reason why a deal is won or lost.

The 2nd area where a sales rep can excel is by learning about the client's business and industry best practices so they can act as a point of unique

expertise for the client, helping them understand the context of their problems, the different solutions, and the macro dynamics. Any unique knowledge and insights that you can bring to the table makes you a valuable resource to the client and can tip the deal in your favor.

You can level-up your value to a client by having conversations with your SMEs and then participating at industry events. As an attendee, you can share your notes with the client. But eventually you'll do even better if you can be a speaker at conferences where you can share your unique perspectives from helping clients in similar situations.

You want to provide a different perspective that will help your client see their business differently. And that expertise can come from sharing case studies from your past work. ■



My CRM said my main competitor was Aaron's BBQ... it was easier to change business than tackle CRM hygiene.



The ABT storytelling framework in sales

Interview with

Park Howell

Business Story Strategist at The Business of Story
(“amplify the impact of your purpose-driven brand with storytelling”).

There’s no denying that storytelling is powerful in business. Yet despite all the books written about it and experts decoding the science of storytelling, companies are still finding it difficult to get on board. Park is a storytelling expert with 35+ years of experience in advertising, branding, and marketing. Storytelling is the most effective way to break through the noise because we buy on emotion, NOT logic. The three forces of story in Park’s ABT framework are: statement of agreement (“and”), statement of contradiction (“but”), and statement of consequence (“therefore”).

All your competitors highlight the same facts & figures. So how are you going to stand out? More importantly, how are you going to convince?

Q: Most people associate storytelling with bedtime stories and think there's no place for storytelling in business.

We all grew up as storytelling monkeys, and we have evolved to parse information in story form. By using storytelling in business, we cut through the noise and engage our audience on a more emotional level.

Most people in business say "Not me, I make all my decisions using logic." But that couldn't be further from the truth.

**Not me, I make
all my decisions using logic.
But that couldn't be
further from the truth.**

You process information in story form, and you remember a story much more than numbers and facts. There are multiple studies that demonstrate how stories are much more effective to connect with your audience, be more memorable, and sell without selling.

Especially when your audience gets bombarded with thousands of messages every day, and you may not hit them at the exact moment where their needs align with your offering, don't you want to be more memorable?

Do you think you will sell more effectively by telling someone you can cut 5% of costs or you're 10% faster, or your customer service has a 5-star rating? Rest assured, all your competitors highlight the same facts & figures. So how are you going to stand out? More importantly, how are you going to convince?

Stories make you more like-able and trustworthy. And when you share a story that resonates with your audience, they become part of it and are more likely to engage.

Q: Unlike some overly complex 9-part storytelling frameworks, yours is super simple. Can you

explain the "ABT" framework?

There are three forces that drive a story: statement of agreement, statement of contradiction, and statement of consequence.

Statement of agreement (the "and") introduces the protagonist and what they want out of life, and gets the audience to say "this person is just like me."

Statement of contradiction (the "but") introduces the problem and creates a plot twist that engages the audience's brain. You get them to lean in, thinking "what's going to happen next?"

And statement of consequence (the "therefore") presents the outcome of the problem in the form of a resolution.

We have codified this into the "ABT" framework, which stands for And, But, Therefore. It's a powerful tool for crafting an engaging narrative.

Q: Can you share a "before" and "after" example of a company that put your framework into practice?

I worked with Kinedyne a couple of years ago. They're a large trucking company. They sell straps and ropes to secure your cargo. So I was teaching them about the ABT framework and storytelling, and first of all we applied it to their landing page.

**The "ABT" framework,
which stands for And, But,
Therefore. It's a powerful
tool for crafting
an engaging narrative.**

The headline on the landing page was: Flatbed Trailer Cargo. Then the main copy was:

"We are the cargo control people and we are here to help truckers and fleets get back control over their cargo. Give us a tie-down problem and we'll give you the ideal solution to make the securement job a smooth and effortless process from straps to ropes"

to hooks. *We have everything you need to help you securely tie down your important cargo... "*

It kept going on like this. So it's just kind of blah, blah, blah. It's all about us, and not nearly enough about the audience. The trick with storytelling is that you want to place your audience ALWAYS at the center of the story. Answer these 3 key questions:

- ▶ *What's in it for them?*
- ▶ *What do they care about?*
- ▶ *What can you help them overcome?*

Then, how can you position yourself as their expert mentor or guide to help them overcome their problem?

So here's how we revised the above text:

*"Your cargo is gold, **and** it's critical to ship it as safely as possible. **But** there are many potholes along the road to a successful delivery. **Therefore**, secure your valuable load with the straps, ropes and hooks from the cargo control people at Kinedyne."*

Using the And-But-Therefore framework, we made it shorter, a little more fun, and a lot more emotional.

The only thing I did differently was use the ABT story framework. This thing is working like magic.

Q: It's great to see storytelling in real life! Can you share another example, and perhaps the impact it had on the company that put storytelling to work?

During the pandemic, I worked with Sharp Electronics. We did a virtual session on ABT storytelling with 130 of their sales and marketing folks.

The beautiful thing about storytelling is that it's a bridge between marketing hyperbole and the sto-

ries that salespeople tell in the wild - in the market.

Again, just as a straightforward illustration, we pulled up a landing page. I'm just going to share a small part and you'll immediately see where it's headed:

"For years, Sharp document products and solutions have been earning high praise and prestigious awards from leading testing organizations. For Sharp, this represents more than just an accumulation of accolades. It means that trusted industry experts as well as..."

The beautiful thing about storytelling is that it's a bridge between marketing hyperbole and the stories that salespeople tell in the wild.

Blah, blah, blah. It's all about Sharp. There's no story to it. It's non-narrative. It's: aren't we wonderful and aren't we great? Everybody thinks so, so you should too.

But feel the difference when you write from the customer's perspective and use the And-But-Therefore... the three forces of story:

*"Shorter runs, quicker turnaround times, complete control over your in-house printing. It's what you want. **But** your productivity is currently stuck on pause. **Therefore**, Sharp digital MFPs and copier printers will have you printing like a pro with our industry-leading innovation."*

I cut it down by two thirds and wrote it from the customer's perspective. The very next day, one of their national sales managers took the ABT that I wrote, rewrote a presentation that he had been trying to get sold for about six months with a major national account, went in, got the contract within an hour, and said:

"The only thing I did differently was use the ABT story framework. This thing is working like magic."

Q: Since it's working so well, what is the biggest pushback you hear against storytelling?

It may sound silly but most companies claim that storytelling is too "woowoo" and a soft skill.

Most of them think that customers buy with logic and reason, but that's not the case. Customers buy with emotion, and storytelling is a powerful tool for engaging their emotions.

Organizations can really benefit from a common storytelling language that everyone can use. This allows for easy communication across the enterprise and helps create a cohesive narrative.

When everyone is singing the same tune, the storytelling becomes more intentional, and the organization can communicate more effectively with their audience. ■

Customers buy with emotion, and storytelling is a powerful tool for engaging their emotions.

Johnson organized the retreat using 100% logic: this place has the lowest crime rate and no wait times.





Don't fight for market share... design & dominate your OWN category

Interview with

John Rougeux

**Category Designer at Category Design Advisors
("don't fight for market share, create demand").**

John is a Category Designer, and I think we'll be seeing a lot more people with this job title in the years to come. Silicon Valley unicorns use category design as a way to dominate a market and grow, and many startups are following suit.

Research shows that if you define a market you're likely to dominate it, and win over 2/3 of the mar-

ket share, which is much better than fighting with tons of competitors in bigger markets.

To reposition your company and create a new category, you need to identify a unique perspective to an existing problem. When you design a new category, it makes your marketing very deliberate and focused... and it's easier for customers to remember what you stand for.

Editor's note on Category Design

The idea behind Category Design is that most companies compete in crowded markets and try to differentiate by claiming that they're better, faster, or cheaper. To communicate this differentiation, they have to scream louder than the competitor next to them. Eventually, the space becomes over-saturated, customers are totally confused or just don't care anymore, and it's a race to the bottom.

The solution is NOT to scream louder. It's to be DIFFERENT in a way that's difficult to copy. To accomplish that, you want to define a new category or niche. Since you're the company defining it, you can more easily dominate it.

It all starts with a deep understanding of your ideal customer and their problem (the "job to be done"). You're not coming up with a new problem but rather with a different way to solve it. And you crystallize that new way in a distinct point of view ("POV").

Research shows that if you establish your brand in your customer's mind for a niche category, you capture more than two-thirds of the entire market!

A great example of category design was when Drift "invented" conversational marketing.

Drift is an AI-powered chatbot. There are hundreds (thousands?) of them. So they had a choice. They could compete head-on with the rest in the same "chatbot" category and fight an uphill battle for scraps... OR what they actually did was create a new category that they called "conversational marketing."

They even wrote the book about it to become

the de facto owner of the category! ("Conversational Marketing: How the World's Fastest Growing Companies Use Chatbots to Generate Leads" published in 2019)

On their website, they only talk about building customer relationships through conversational marketing. It's never about the lowly chatbot. Drift shifted the entire narrative to be customer-focused... instead of talking about AI, new features, or how they may be marginally more accurate than competitors.

Help customers think about their problem in a different way.

Q: Let's start with the basics: WHAT is category design? And WHY is it important?

Category design is a business strategy that involves creating and dominating a new category. This is done by developing a unique perspective on a problem and repositioning the company around that perspective.

By doing so, the company can become the leader within that category, rather than just being another me-too player.

Research shows that if you establish your brand in your customer's mind for a niche category, you capture more than two-thirds of the entire market!

That's because, when the customer thinks of that category, you immediately come to mind. For example, when someone mentions "electric cars" you think of Tesla. That's powerful brand awareness and top-of-mind that can't be bought. Competitors can spend more money on advertising and still will lag.

Q: Every company would love to have that word association between its brand and its category. But how do you identify a new category to design?

Many founders of successful companies identify a gap in the market, and a way to solve it. Most

competitors go where the big money is and attack incumbents in large markets. But it can be much more effective to go after a niche that only you solve really well. When most companies zig, you should zag.

This can happen either when you start the company or when you launch a new offering, or when you decide it's time to pivot or reposition your company. Perhaps your offering has become semi-commoditized in the eyes of the customer.

It makes your marketing very deliberate and focused. It's easier for customers to remember what you stand for.

How do you stand out? You don't have to find a new problem to tackle. Stick with the same problem, but find a unique perspective. Help customers think about their problem in a different way.

Q: Can you share an example?

A very interesting example is how Saab dominated the market for "the winter car". Saab couldn't win as just another car so they positioned themselves as "the winter car" and dominated that space.

This clear positioning makes it much easier to have a POV that resonates with your ideal customers and works as the north star for your messaging, offerings, acquisitions, etc. It makes your marketing very deliberate and focused. It's easier for customers to remember what you stand for. So if someone thinks "what's a good car for winter conditions" Saab immediately comes to mind.

Q: That's very interesting. I'd think that "winter car" would be a dangerously narrow niche of people who are interested in that. How niche can you go?

You can easily go after a niche that most people wouldn't consider worth tackling perhaps. That way, you create a hyper-specialized solution that will quickly resonate with your small ideal target audience.

However, when you become very successful in one niche, you dominate that niche and create a very loyal following. This typically translates into expansion either within that market or going after other niche markets and developing a niche solution for them.

What often starts as a tiny market can easily expand into a very large market. It's funny, but people often have very similar problems they try to solve. But if you try to solve the problem for everyone, you have to boil the ocean to find your early adopters, most customers don't believe you can help them specifically because they believe their problem to be more unique than it is, and you have to deal with tons of competitors.

Benioff made noise about the big competitors. When they tried to fight back... that's what gave Salesforce the legitimacy and the airtime it really needed to catch on.

Q: And once you have your niche and the new positioning, how do you evangelize this new category?

Evangelizing a new category can be challenging, as it requires a shift in the way people think about the problem being solved. One approach that's worked very well in the past is to create a lightning strike. Think of the Salesforce example, where Marc Benioff hired protesters to disrupt a Siebel conference with "no software" signs back in the early days.



*They said create a new category...
but nobody's buying "the winter car"*

Switching to the cloud may seem a commonplace idea now. But back then it was heresy. No enterprise would go for it. So he needed to shake things up. He couldn't do that by making noise about his own company since nobody cared. Benioff made noise about the big competitors. When they tried to fight back... that's what gave Salesforce the legitimacy and the airtime it really needed to catch on. So how can you make your customers think about a big problem in a new way? One way is by attacking the status quo, especially if you can identify a niche audience of early adopters who may not mind a little compromise.

Q: *So would you say Category Design is a business fad or does it have a long runway and it's*

here to stay?

Category Design is not a new concept by any means, and it's definitely NOT a fad. It can be traced back to Al Ries & Jack Trout's book "Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind" that was published in 1981.

But even though the concept has been around for a long time, only recently it's been codified and gained widespread attention thanks to books like "Play Bigger" by Al Ramadan, Dave Peterson, Christopher Lochhead, and Kevin Maney.

As more businesses begin to understand the benefits of creating a new category, I believe category design will become even more ingrained in how people think about doing business. ■



Make your sales north star “quality over quantity”

Interview with

Aaron George

VP of North American Sales at Sigma7.

Enterprise sales is all about quality over quantity. Most sales channels are becoming saturated with automation tools. So the best way to stand out is through your creativity. Focus on a handful of accounts that can make your year and career and go deep into truly understanding their challenges and how you can solve them. And level-up your sales presentations by only including slides that are compelling to your audience. It's NOT a numbers game!

Q: Many B2B salespeople are having a difficult time breaking through and getting traditional channels to work. What works best in enterprise sales?

I believe that enterprise sales is really about quality over quantity. The best way I can describe it is that enterprise sales is like chess.

I'll give you a great example of how I recently broke into a new Fortune 500 client, starting with

a cold but very carefully crafted email.

I started by visiting their website to do a bit of research. In this particular case, the company was a chatbot AI solution. I poked around as if I was a customer. Used their own chatbot and called into their call center, trying to get a quote from this company.

Going through that buying process, I identified a few things where our solution could help. So I went back and crafted a message describing my journey that was more like customer feedback instead of a sales email.

I sent a note like this to the company's COO, who then forwarded it around a number of times within the organization: "Here are some things that I was surprised that you didn't have. And then here's how we can fix that in the future."

As a result, a few days later, one of their VPs contacted me and said, yeah, let's get on a call to explore how we can work together.

Q: *That's very interesting! But how often does a super-thoughtful approach like this work? And how can you scale that approach?*

I'd say don't think about scaling your sales motion. Do the un-scalable, and THAT's what's going to bring you a higher win rate and bigger deals.

I believe that enterprise sales is really about quality over quantity. The best way I can describe it is that enterprise sales is like chess.

It really boils down to quality over quantity. When you're crafting a well-thought-out email and you're going into great lengths to actually add value and make sure your solution is a great fit, then you're not looking for a large volume. Even just a handful of deals can make your year. So it really pays off to put in the time.

Instead of taking a spray-and-pray approach

– like all your competitors – figure out a way to truly stand out. There's no one killer strategy or sales tactic. You have to be creative to find a way to stand out. And you can do that by carefully crafting your message so a) it really resonates with what's top of mind with your prospect, and b) it demonstrates that you truly understand their pain points deeply.

Don't think about scaling your sales motion. Do the un-scalable, and THAT's what's going to bring you a higher win rate and bigger deals.

It really depends on who you're approaching within an organization. If you're selling to the IT team you need a different message than if you're selling to the VP of Operations, and a different message if you're selling to the CMO. Because they have different priorities and objectives.

End users really care about: "I want you to help me get my project done. I need to do my job better. I need more tools to be more productive."

Whereas the executives care more about overall business impact: "how does this affect my overall strategy, and how does it impact my department's ROI?"

Q: *Do you have any tips for giving a great sales presentation?*

I had this epiphany when I was flying all around the country pitching enterprises while I had my 2 young daughters waiting for me at home. When you're away from family and you're sacrificing for a sales meeting, it puts things into perspective.

Since I was making that sacrifice, I didn't want to just go through the motions and walk the client through the slides. I went back to first principles thinking to figure out exactly what they needed to

hear from me in order to take the next step.

So now, whenever I put together a presentation, I go through each slide and ask myself: "Why does a customer care about that? What's really important about what I just said to them?"

That really helps me distill and refine my message. If I can't find a compelling reason for a slide's existence from the client's perspective, it's gone. And that's how I often end up with a 10-slide deck.

My deck only has what customers truly care about and NOTHING else.

Q: What do you see as the biggest sales mistake?

I see people often have a hard time differentiating between interest and pain. For example, let's say you go to a conference and you've set up a booth. People are coming by wanting to learn and understand a little bit more about what you do.

These are conversations based on INTEREST, which shouldn't be confused with actual pain. Pain would imply that they're actual leads and may be taking action down the road.

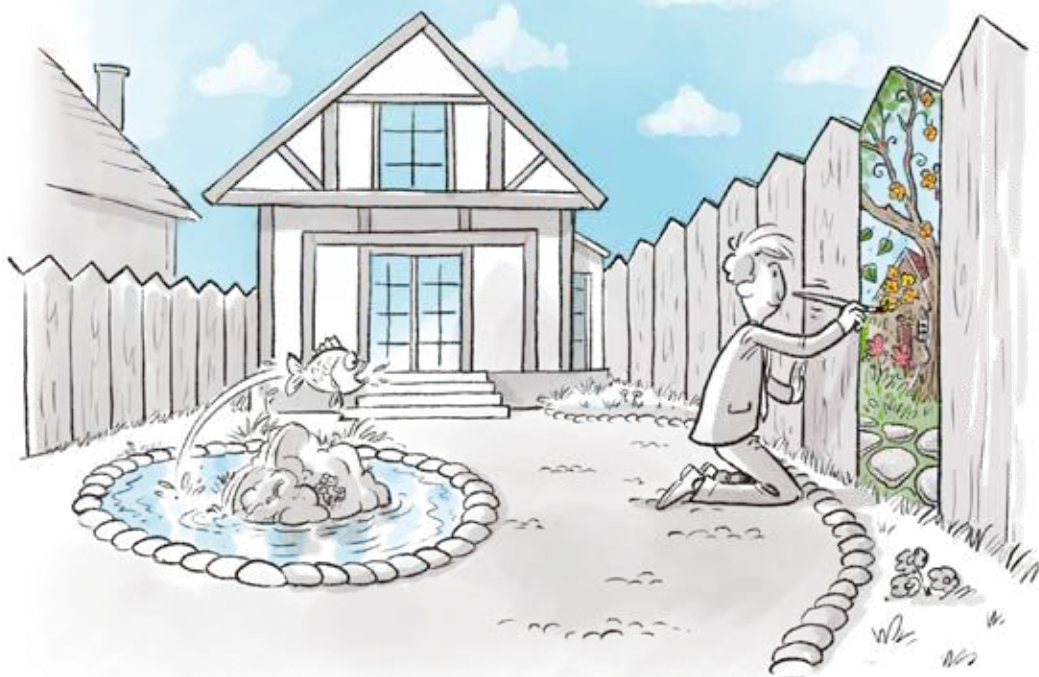
But you're talking to people who're just curious about your solution. What happens is that, coming out of that conference, you waste months chasing these people that came by their booth.

You can tell pain vs interest because a person with pain won't ask surface-level questions. They will probe deeper: how do you compare with competitors. What would you do in XYZ scenario? How would you address this problem? How long does it take to onboard?

When you start getting specific questions, that's the signal that you have a potential buyer looking for a solution to a real pain. ■

My deck only has what customers truly care about and NOTHING else.

Johnson is all about quality over quantity.





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