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**Collateral Damage: Are Brochures Derailing Your Sales?**

**By Jill Konrath**

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When companies introduce new products and services, everyone is excited and upbeat – especially the sales force. They have a new reason to go back to old customers, a chance to knock out competitors and the potential to have a great year selling.

Yet all too often, things don't quite work out as planned and sales come in slower than everyone projected. The tension rises. Marketing and Sales start pointing fingers, blaming each other for the lackluster results.

Sound familiar? I can't tell you how many times I've seen this happen in my years as a consultant. Lots of factors are involved, but today we're going to look at one that salespeople have total control over.

Recently I worked with a company who had just introduced a new technology product. It was way ahead of the competition and had a strong value proposition. I spent a day out in the field with one of their salespeople to get a better understanding of their sales process.

He was a real nice guy. He'd been with the company for thirteen years and always done a decent job. We had an appointment with a good prospect – someone he had called on before, but never done business with. The sales rep's plan was to leverage this meeting into a full-blown needs analysis.

Everything started out fine, but within 10 minutes he was heading into deep trouble. It all started when he mentioned his

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excitement with their new product. The buyer asked some techie questions that the sales rep understood. They talked some more. Then, the buyer asked the near-fatal question, "Do you have a brochure?"

Now you're probably thinking that's a good sign – that this guy was interested and the sales rep was doing a great job. Well, that's just what the sales rep thought too.

He quickly pulled one from his briefcase and laid it on the desk between them. The buyer leaned forward and started reading. "Can it do this?" he asked, referring to a specific capability. "How

about that? What speed? How does it connect?" The barrage of questions continued for what seemed like an eternity to me.

The sales rep was getting even more excited. He pointed out other features they'd stressed at the launch meeting, highlighting how much better they were than what else was on the market. The buyer's head was nodding, as if in agreement.

I knew things were going downhill, but couldn't do anything to stop them. I was only there to observe. At last, the killer question emerged: "How much does it cost?"

The sales rep, trying to deflect it, explained that a full assessment was needed to configure the system properly. He suggested that as the next step, but the damage was already done.

"You'd be wasting your time," the buyer said. "There's no way we can spend that kind of money right now. Besides, it can't ..." He proceeded to pick apart some minor detail about the system.

The sales rep looked puzzled, not understanding why this qualified buyer would so quickly reject the new product – especially when it had such a financially attractive value proposition. He was never able to get the meeting back on track. We left with no follow-up planned.

You know what the problem was?

It was that darn brochure! By bringing it out so early, the sales rep lost control of the sale process. He didn't uncover any problems, difficulties or dissatisfaction with the current system. He didn't explore any business ramifications or find any

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pay-offs for making a change. No wonder the buyer said it was too expensive.

Worse thing is, the sales rep dug his own grave; everything that happened was totally preventable.

### LESSONS LEARNED

1. The untimely use of brochures and other marketing collateral quickly derails even the best sales efforts with highly qualified prospects.

2. If your sales process requires multiple calls and involves a variety of decision makers, keep your new product or service brochures in the car on the first call.

3. Use early sales calls to focus on the customer, their goals,

processes, challenges, issues, bottlenecks and needs.

4. Save your brochures till later – you may never even need to use them!

Jill Konrath, President of Selling to Big Companies, helps small businesses win big contracts in the corporate market.

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### **Is Renters' Insurance Really Necessary?**

**By dan the roommate man**

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You and your landlord share a common goal: You both want to ensure the protection of your interests.

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Obtaining a security deposit from you — usually ranging from \$100 to a full month's rent, and averaging \$250 — is how your landlord obtains a degree of insurance from you. The deposit covers your landlord should you cause any damage to your apartment while you are a tenant. Your landlord, in turn, may keep the deposit if you fail to pay your rent or you leave before the end of your lease. However, if, as a tenant, you keep your end of the bargain — following the terms of your lease and leaving your apartment in good condition when you leave — the deposit is refundable.

So how do you protect your own interests as a tenant? Renters' insurance. If you're an apartment-dweller, you're probably accustomed to brochures dangling from your door that advertise various renters' insurance policies. And if you're like many renters, you probably disregard them. But you may want to consider taking out insurance. Before you say, "But I'm not going to cause any damage to my apartment," remember that renters don't always cause damage themselves. Mother nature, or other tenants with little regard for your property, could prove to be the source of your problems later.

According to Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, policies typically provide coverage for the following renters' pitfalls:

- \* Damage to personal property from fire or wind
- \* Theft
- \* Personal liability in the event you are sued over accidental injury to others who are in your apartment
- \* Accidental damage to property of others in your care
- \* Living expenses if you are forced to live elsewhere while your apartment is being repaired

This list doesn't begin to elaborate on the multitude of other possibilities for disaster: An electrical surge fries your computer, television, and/or stereo; while visiting your neighbor, you tip over his barbecue and start a fire; or you accidentally cause injury to someone away from your apartment; and the list goes on and on. And of course, as we've all discovered, we can never discount such crazy-sounding possibilities — because they can and do happen if and only if we're not prepared (or covered) for them.

Note that renters' insurance policies may differ according to the insurance company in question, as well as the laws in your state. An insurance representative will be able to determine what type of policy best meets your needs. If you've thrown away all of those brochures dangling from your door handle, the Internet is a good place to do your homework — specifically apartment-search sites. Links to renters' insurance information will fill you in on the details, and you may apply online.

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