

Remember High Tech can equal High Touch

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By Doug Curfman

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Do you remember the commercial where the sales manager handed out airline tickets because the sales staff was losing touch with their customers? That impactful commercial typifies the fear many corporate executives have when approaching the natural extension of e-business. I believe high tech equals high touch.

Here are some essential concerns to keep in mind when approaching e-business. These questions can help you focus your electronic growth so that you will humanize your e-business strategies.

1.) Today, how do you communicate on a daily with your customers?

Look at your current business model and consider how you take orders. By building an online order taking process, you can offer your customers the best of both worlds with traditional and online ordering. This online extension of order taking will save your customers time and create good will toward your company.

Technology can extend order taking by linking with your existing inventory control and accounting systems therefore streamlining your processes. The streamlining will reduce your customers' paperwork and cost per transaction as well as making it easier to interact with your company.

2.) What are the repeat questions your customers ask?

A simple, focused web presence can head off those repetitive questions from potential customers. Yes, you are right in that you can turn face-to-face questions into a sale. You need to remember today's customers are using email and the Internet to scout potential vendors. Today buyers do their research before picking up the telephone. Online FAQ's will provide the background they are seeking so they are more informed when they contact you. This gives your sales associates an advantage. They can turn that potential call into a personal, human interaction if sales associates do not have to repeat FAQ's.

3.) How many of your customers are online and actively using e-mail?

Ignore your customers and they will go away. This common phrase is a lesson in how not to treat your customers. A recent study by Jupiter communications revealed that 42 percent of companies tested didn't respond to relevant email inquiries and took more than five days. If your customers are using

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email (and they are) then you must be ready to respond.

Consider your business model. Who responds to customer inquiry? How will you handle email requests? How will they be delivered? Should you outsource? How will you track? Can you capture email for future marketing purposes?

4.)Is your product developed to customers' specifications with periodic approval?

A majority of business on the Internet is conducted within an Extranet. This is a closed environment protected from general Internet traffic designed for communication with buyers. If your company is in frequent contact with the customer asking for approval at various points of product development, then an Extranet must be a consideration. You can design a system that allows your customer to view the product and give check off approval. They can view architectural designs, CAD drawings, photographs, detailed specifications, or work-in-progress. The added, and personalized bonus, is that your customer

can do this at their convenience. You can call or visit but the time during that visit is spent working on the customer relationship – not order specifications.

5.)Do you cross sell or up sell when taking an order?

New designs in web interfaces can deliver with the same selling dynamic. You can suggest other products during a customer search. New software even allows you to save the search. You can capture your prospects email and categorize it for future marketing efforts. For a truly personalized touch, follow up inquiries with a telephone call – or personalized email. You can ask your customers if they would like this feature – taking service to all time high.

6.)Let your customers know you are online.

If you build it, they will not come. The old thought that if 'I go online, new customers will come running' is false. You need to employ new and traditional methods of marketing in order to let potential customers that you are online. A recent online company sent a simple postcard announcing their new online service – within three days of the mailing, they noticed a 65% increase in traffic. You may not see this type of increase but you need to consider all avenues of marketing to notify customers of your new service.

Moving into e-business should not replace traditional methods of selling. Approach the process as an extension of your current model and look for additional opportunities to communicate to your customer. Finally, keep your customers in mind when you develop your model. As we said in the beginning, keep that concern in front and you will develop a profitable, humanized e-business.

Doug Curfman is Director of Marketing and Sales for Data Direct Inc. Data Direct Inc. has a firm philosophy of using proven technology to drive cost-effective database solutions.

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How to Sell High Tech Solutions

By Amy Fox

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How to Sell to High Tech Solutions

Many companies are looking to improve upon the speed, security, and accessibility of business technologies, especially satellite and broadband connections to the internet. While customers are becoming more savvy, many don't speak 'tech-ese,' and they still are baffled by terms such as routers, IPSEC, T-1s, WIFI, and broadband. While these buyers may have a genuine interest and need for the products they investigate, more often than not their sales experience ends up a frustrating and confusing one.

Don't Talk Tech!

Salespeople are often caught in the hype for their own products. It's easy to lose touch with a client's perspective with this approach. The other major blunder a tech salesperson may make is their need to be perceived as experts in their field. Talking tech to the point of no return does not usually yield a promising sale. How does one handle the tendency in tech sales to "show up and throw up?" It is critical to address ineffective sales approaches in the tech market, because these mistakes are often the most significant barriers to high performance.

Communicate Don't Baffle

Bringing the human side to selling high tech products is not easy, but it must enter into the equation or else a salesperson's success is at risk. Communicating with clients, not baffling them, is key to building long-term relationships. Technology is evolving, and the customer needs to become aware of the new technology and not be intimidated by it.

Focus on Client Needs

I conduct high technology sales training throughout the United States for a variety of clients. For sales professionals in the high tech field, I often stress the need to shift the focus from the salesperson to the client. This is difficult, because products are complex, and sales people get caught up in the innovation and creativity the product may provide rather than focusing on the client's needs. Typically, a salesperson approaches the client with a laundry list of questions or a lengthy Powerpoint presentation. Sometimes the questions are canned, or the presentation is a reflection of the salesperson's agenda. The questions or presentation are designed to steer the conversation towards the highlights of the products for sale or the expertise of the salesperson.

Turn the Tone from an Interview to a Conversation

Instead of assuming knowledge of the client's needs, I recommend a salesperson begin the first meeting by asking the client about their expectations. I also advise them to cancel the list of leading questions. Replace this with a list of results the client desires and their potential business challenges.

Shifting the focus from the salesperson to the client will change the tone of the meeting from an interview to a conversation.

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Ask the Right Questions

The art of selling is still about asking good questions. They simply must be framed with a different purpose. Try building in questions that put the client in the driver's seat. For example, 'What would you like to learn more about?' or "How can I help resolve these issues?" These questions can generate a host of answers that relate back to the product and the solutions technology offers.

Shortened presentations that focus on companies' capabilities and how to expand them through technology help close deals. Info dumps are a bore and can even damage the sale process because the customer is not engaged. If high tech salespeople lose themselves in touting the capabilities of the product, they lose their most distinguishing feature - themselves.

Amy Fox has designed and delivered sales training for Fortune 500 telecommunications and technology firms for companies such as Global Crossing Telecommunications, Cincinnati Bell, and Trivantis. Ms. Fox has taught M.B. A. courses at Xavier University on creating a coaching culture. Amy Fox founded Accelerated Business Results in 2003. Visit

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