

10 ways to mess up a perfectly good sales presentation

By JOHN FOUST

Are you making too many sales these days? Is business too good? If you'd like to cut back on those annoying new customers, try a couple of these field-tested, sales-reducing techniques.

- 1. Don't do advance research.** It takes valuable time to learn about your prospect's business, potential challenges, and competition. Why should you conduct an analysis of their past advertising expenditures? The only thing that matters is what you tell them today.
- 2. Don't ask questions.** And don't make any effort to gain information during the appointment. Instead, do all of the talking. After all, you are an advertising expert. They are the ones who should be listening to you.
- 3. Give the same presentation to every prospect.** In addition to cutting your preparation time, this will allow you to create a comfort zone for yourself. Why customize presentations to fit the individual needs of each prospect when you can develop a one-size-fits-all approach?
- 4. Don't bother to get to know the gatekeeper.** That's not the person you're there to see. And even though the gatekeeper could be a good source of information, he or she is probably too busy to talk to you. If you have to sit in the waiting room, that's a perfect time to read the magazines on their coffee table or make a few phone calls.
- 5. Rely strictly on numbers.** When you talk about the specifics of readership, don't think of real-life examples or other ways to make the numbers come to life. Statistics are important and should always stand on their own – with no explanation.
- 6. Criticize your competitors.** Your prospect needs to know how bad they really are. If you know some juicy gossip about other papers or media outlets in your market, be sure to work that into the conversation. Your prospect will appreciate the information and would never suspect that you will talk about them behind their back.
- 7. Don't turn off your cell phone.** You wouldn't want to miss a call from a more important client or a friend. And be sure to check your e-mail a couple of times during the appointment. That's a good way to show your prospect that you are so heavily scheduled that they should feel fortunate you are taking time to meet with them.
- 8. Don't talk about benefits.** Focus your attention exclusively on the features of your advertising product without connecting those dry, inanimate facts to potential benefits. Resist the temptation to mention any marketing problems which could be solved by advertising in your paper.
- 9. Don't use exhibits.** Your prospect should already be familiar with your paper, so there's no need to weigh down your briefcase with the latest issue of your paper, an up-to-date copy of your media kit, or samples of the ads your creative department has produced.
- 10. Don't follow up.** You're far too busy to send a handwritten note or an e-mail to thank your prospect for meeting with you. You can always write later – if you have time.