How to Solve The 5 Biggest Sales Problems

-by Thomas Libby

Although most of what we consider the "biggest" problems in sales are opinions, or can be considered very specific to the person, product/service, industry, or many other factors. There are some that seem to pop up frequently among sales professionals. I'm sure if you check with some survey company or a larger marketing agency there may be some variations. However, if you've been in sales long enough, you end up knowing a few people that will chat with you about what they're encountering in the field. Also, good to note that these "problems" can change over time. As we use newer tools, technology, and sales methodologies the problems change with them. With all that, I'd like to address some recent problems that seem to be consistently brought up by sales professionals.

Identifying good prospects

Let's start by saying that there is no such thing as a bad lead. But having leads turn to true prospects is a totally different statement. The real problem here can be time management and allowing sales reps to chase after leads that aren't really qualified yet. An automation tool with a good rules engine in place and having a good lead nurturing program can solve this if there is a clear identifiable handoff point to sales. A true SQL (sales qualified lead) passed to a sales rep has a much higher closing rate than cold prospect lists. There may also be help in the form of an account scoring process where higher scored leads take precedent over lower scores or a completely different process is devised for true SQL's vs. random or low scoring leads.

Working directly with the Decision Maker

Lately I've come to realize that "Decision Maker" is a relative term. What we've traditionally labeled as decision makers were the "C"- Level, you know…the CEO, COO, CFO, or at times the Executive VP's however, in recent years there has been a paradigm shift in the buying process. The decision makers are now more of a committee of sorts which can include any employee within the company. The biggest mistakes I see in this area are reps that don't spend the time to identify their prospects Buying Process, identifying all the parties involved in the purchasing of their products/service, and just assuming every prospect falls within their sales process.

Let's take for granted that you've done your due diligence and already identified the decision-making parties (all of them), you understand their buying process, and figured out that the buying process and your sales process are harmonious. The next problem is to make sure everyone is involved the entire way. If for some reason there are steps not checked off or people aren't attending appropriate meetings; they may not be ready to proceed, you're not transferring enough confidence in yourself, the fit isn't right, or they may just not be ready. Either way there are times that the rep should just walk away…even if it's for a short time to regroup and requalify, then reengage.

Getting prospects to answer your call/email

My guess is that this challenge is not industry specific nor does it matter the level of experience the rep has. This is most likely the biggest problem facing sales people today. It doesn't surprise me with the tremendous demand on our time from every outlet there is (and there's a lot). We are constantly distracted by things like email and social media, which by itself can be a time suck. But getting through all the noise is the sales reps challenge. My first suggestion is that you may have to take a step back before you move forward. Take a sincere look at the messaging. Are the messages you're sending/leaving in voice mail any different than all the rest of the tens or hundreds of emails or voice mails that people are hearing or reading? If so, you're just blending in and giving your prospect ZERO reason to call or email you back. Your messaging is of the utmost importance and should be different, disruptive even, when compared to the masses. Think emotionally and be more compelling than the rest of the flooding information we see daily.

Also, a thought, don't think for a second that a single call or email will do. It's been proven that most sales people give up somewhere around the 2nd or 3rd attempt at contact. This is far from enough work put into this effort. Most professionals will tell you that it takes up to 8 attempts at connecting to even get someone's attention and possibly another 2 – 4 to get someone to respond. So, don't give up so easily…especially if you've done the work to really qualify the lead. That also leads to another issue of "what not to do". Don't continue to use the same 2 or 3 email templates. If you must reach out 8 – 10 or more times, let's spend the time to make sure the emails are unique (you can use these templates on other people, of course but be prepared to create 8 – 10 unique email messages).

Lastly, make sure this messaging is continued throughout all your outreach channels. Be consistent with emails, social media, your web site, etc.

Prospects asking for discounted rates/prices

This is probably one of my biggest pet peeves. I really can't understand why sales people consistently entertain this ideal. I believe when a prospect asks for a discount or reduced rates, a couple of things may have happened. Either the rep didn't do a good job qualifying or the rep hasn't provided enough value to the prospect. Even in the case of a prospect saying; "my budget is X and if you can do it for this, the deal is yours". My first instinct is to try an alternate solution that fits the budget, not to just discount the price to get the deal. You may also be in position to alter the delivery method or to spread out the billing to fit the budget restraints rather than devalue your product or service. Sometimes you may have to lean on upper management to think outside the box, but I strongly suggest you do so before you drop that price. If you are upper management, then reach out to a peer group for ideas or a consultant in the sales industry that could help with an approach you may not have thought of. Dropping the price should be the last resort, if at all!

Deals closing
Ok, so you've gone through the whole sales process, checked all the boxes, and made sure all the players are in the loop, but the sale isn't closing. What could be the issue? Several come to mind but the ones on top are:

The rep didn't qualify the prospect properly or t**he contracts are too lengthy or complicated**

We've already discussed the importance of qualifying so for this section we'll focus on the one reps may have little or no influence on, the actual legal documents needed to close the deal. From personal experience I can tell you this isn't as scary as it seems. Business owners and C- Levels are used to seeing contracts. However, you can soften this by being very transparent. As the deal gets to the point of near close, make sure you prep your prospect for what they're about to see. Give them a heads up to language that you already know has been issues in the past and let them know of any boiler plate language such as NDA's, privacy clauses, security, or other language they may have seen in other contracts. If possible, and if you're in charge of these contracts…make them as simple as possible or have your prospect have influence over the content of the contract.

I know these sales challenges aren't everyone's but if you have one or two of them, I hope this helps and you have a take a way or two that can give you an immediate impact to your sales.