

Prepare to win!

*Back in
15 Minutes*

Rushing into a sales appointment is nothing but a recipe for failure, according to ASHLEY LATTER

Whilst watching the European Championships over the summer, I was obviously disappointed when England went out of the tournament on penalties – for the third time in my lifetime. The day after the Portugal game, I was watching a programme about Matt Le Tissier, the ex-Southampton centre forward who had a fantastic reputation of scoring penalties and free kicks. In fact, out of 48 penalties he took, he only missed one.

The programme went on to say how he developed the skill of being able to change the direction of the penalty at the very last moment depending on the direction of the diving goalkeeper. He was a master who spent many

hours practicing this skill. What is the purpose of this story, and how does it relate to sales? In my opinion, it is all down to the preparation and practice that Matt undertook to become an expert and to achieve the success that he did. Would you agree that if you are going to be successful in a sales appointment or in a presentation, it is sometimes won or lost before you have even gone into the room?

What are some of the things that you should be doing beforehand? I recently was working with a company that had the opportunity in three weeks' time to pitch for business worth well over £1 million in the first year and, if everything went to plan, the business would grow at a rate of around

25 per cent per year. This was a distribution company and such an order would make a serious impact on sales and the bottom line.

Marks out of ten?

The salesperson dealing with the account – I'll call him *Bob* – went to the prospect and asked a question that really opened up the existing state of the sales process. He enquired on a scale of one to ten (one being *we have no chance of getting the business* and ten *we have a very good opportunity*) where his company stood. The prospect replied that Bob's company stood at about level six as, although he liked the products Bob had to offer and they were superior to his competitors', there would be massive upheaval to change and also they would have to encourage their own customers to pay slightly more.

We decided to set aside a day to prepare for the meeting and discuss every issue the prospect may raise and how they could be addressed. The meeting lasted over four hours and a number of main issues were revealed. These were:

- The distribution of the product – especially as it might have to go to several different sites all over the UK
- The product was seasonal... could large amounts be delivered in a short period of time?
- The product was 5 per cent more in price than the customer's existing purchase. How could he sell the benefits?
- Whether the customer's customer would like the product.

During the following week, Bob and his MD put everything

the company had done. The result was a trial order and if everything goes well here, a nationwide role-out will follow.

What lessons can be learned from this example, and how can you prepare for your own appointments?

1 Research the company you are prospecting with. Visit its website and get the company results and brochure before you visit. Print off the information and take it into the meeting with you – it shows that you have done research. You might even mention something that you have read. It shows you are professional.

2 If possible, visit one of the prospect's sites beforehand, or even their head office. You can always get useful information for your meeting.

3 Take testimonials of happy customers with you. Include facts and figures and any other evidence that you feel might be relevant to the meeting. It is better to have more than you might need than too little. However, you might want to consider not walking in with several suitcases.

4 Think of any objections you might face and prepare answers.

5 Consider a strategy for the meeting. Think of key questions to ask the prospect and, most importantly, have an agenda prepared. Have an 'end game'.

6 Last, but certainly not least, don't be frightened to ask for help within your organisation.

Take a look at your diary for the next few weeks and set aside some serious preparation time. Then prepare to win

Case study: On your bike

Roy Jones is Managing Director of Vega Corporation, one of the UK's leading cycle distributors with clients including JJB and Toy R US. Roy is passionate about making a difference to his customers' sales and, when he has a first appointment with a new prospect, he always visits a few of the stores to get a feel of what they sell and what opportunities he might find. The key to this is to think like a customer and view the store as if you wanted to buy a selection of bikes and not have a salesperson's hat on. He finds that by doing this, he can see things from a different viewpoint. He tries to think like the end customer because, at the end of the day, that's who is buying the product. Obviously, the more bikes the public buys, the happier his own customer will be.



to one side and concentrated on the one meeting. They investigated production reports, projected transport costs for the next five years and put together a report on how they would be able to transport the products for the next five years, even allowing for significant growth. In addition, they researched the prospect's customers, did a Return On Investment report on how they could possibly make more profits by buying from them. They even took their Head of Production to the meeting, to re-assure the prospect.

Needless to say, the meeting went well and the prospect was very impressed with all the work and preparation that

and, if you are ultimately selling to your customer's customers, think like one of them. ■

the author

Ashley Latter joined Dale Carnegie in 1992 and soon became the company's top UK salesperson. Two years ago he launched his sales coaching service.
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