



Part six in an eight-part series about sales strategies that improve profit.

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successful sales

Why Focus on Sales,
January 2003

Planning to Succeed,
February 2003

Relationship Development,
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The Art of Asking Good Questions,
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Identifying the Need, May 2003

**Presenting Your Company and Products,
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Achieving the Commitment

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The articles in this series outline proven sales techniques that increase profits. If you missed an article, you are missing a crucial step. You can find each article in the series at www.gpnmag.com.

successful sales: Presenting Your Company and Products

Previous articles in this series have discussed the steps that make up the initial phases of the sales process. They have explained the sales theory of planning the commitment you will ask of your customer; developing a relationship with the customer; asking the customer good questions (about both personal and business related topics); and identifying your customer's needs. All of these steps are important, and all have led you here — to the point of actually presenting your products and services.

This is where you get the opportunity to present to your (potential) customer the reasons why it would be beneficial for them to purchase your product or service. However, there is a critical part of this phase that, if not done properly, can thwart all of the hard work you did in getting to this point. That being: You must always be sure to link the product or service you are presenting to specific customer needs that you have come to understand through the previous questioning phase.

In our last article, which appeared in the May 2003 issue of *GPN*, we covered the importance of understanding customer needs through asking good questions — questions that relate to the benefits of your products or services. Further, it was established that it is important to give the customer an opportunity to acknowledge that the needs you uncovered were indeed valid and of interest to them. It is with this in mind that an effective presentation can be made. This understanding sets the stage for a presentation that has meaning and relevance to your customer and will ultimately be successful in selling your product or service.

DEMONSTRATE THE NEED

The best way to link your presentation with the customers' needs is by acknowledging what you heard them tell you during questioning. As an example, let's say that during the questioning process, your customer (a garden retailer) expressed a need for store merchandising. The questions you asked led you to this need, and you now want to let the customer know how you can provide services or products to fill their need for store merchandising. The easiest way to link what your customer has told you to your presentation is to acknowledge what you heard. You might say, "you told me that you needed improved merchandising in your stores." Other segues might be, "you mentioned that..." or "you told me you were interested in..." There are other statements that can also be used to acknowledge that you understood what your customer expressed and are trying to solve their needs. You should feel free to use any statement you think accomplishes the goal. The key is to just simply state one of these linking phrases to the need you heard and to do this in your own natural way.

This act of linking what your customer told you to points in your presentation is a very powerful sales technique. It immediately tells the customer that you listened to them, and that you understood what they said. In turn, it shows a sincerity on your part to sell not just what you want to sell or have available, but rather, to sell the customer what they need.

FEATURES AND BENEFITS

Another critical part of product presentation is the need to present your product or service in terms of features and benefits. ♦

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Doing this will allow you to make a strong connection with the customer's stated need and how your specific product or service will address that need.

Features and benefits must always be stated as an inseparable couple. One cannot exist without the other. State only a feature, and your customer may not understand exactly what your product can do for them. Stating only a benefit, while perhaps a little better, still leaves some customers guessing about what part of your product or service you are referring and how your product can achieve that benefit.

Features and benefits are quite different, and each must be understood in order to make an effective product presentation. Features simply make a statement about a characteristic of your product (e.g., all of my company's 4-inch geraniums come with full color, oversized signage.), while a benefit describes what this characteristic will do for your customer (e.g., colorful signage helps to differentiate a product, rescue it from commodity status and demand a higher price.).

The following is an example using the kinds of linking statements discussed above to connect the features and benefits of your product or service with the customer's stated needs:

Linking Statement. When we talked last time, you told me that you needed improved merchandising in your stores. Is this still the case?

Feature. Our company has a team of 20 merchandisers, each assigned to a specific store location and each having three scheduled store visits at that location each week.

Benefit. This means that your displays will always be fresh and well stocked. Further, an individual who has a personal knowledge of a specific store will organize it more appropriately, take more pride in the store and its success, and will come to have an understanding of the store's needs and its customer's habits.

This approach to product presentation will always be more effective than one that only focuses on product features and has no relevance to a need specifically stated by the customer. This is the kind of approach that will fit most completely with the months of preparation leading up to the production presentation.

Features and benefits will best be referenced if they are thought out in advance of your presentation. Think about them ahead of time, and write them down. Even put them into a sell sheet to be distributed and referenced during the presentation. The result will make the extra effort worthwhile.

Next month, we will discuss the most important part of the sales process, achieving a commitment from your customer to actually purchase your product or service. [GPN](#)

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