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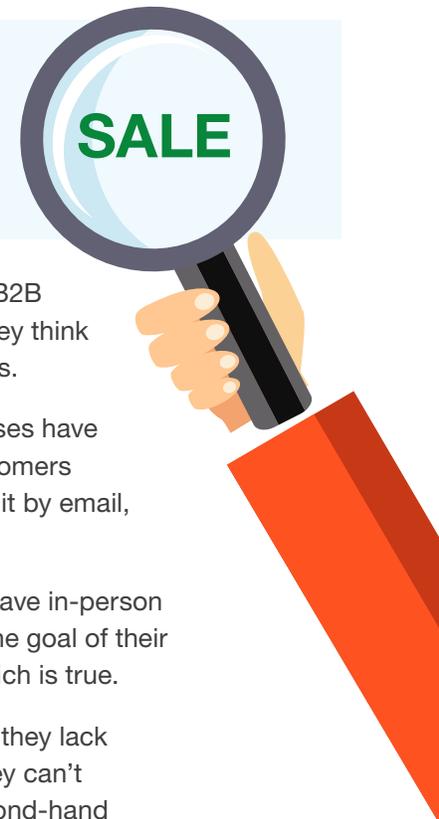
This compelling article takes a look at the best way to decode the enigma of sales presentations. Learn the key attributes your team needs to master that will make customers fall over themselves to select your company as their supplier.

How To Win The Presentation Trifecta For More Sales

In B2B sales presentations, sales teams turn themselves inside out trying to impress customers. The Oscar for winning those performances is to reach the next and last step of the buying process — where sales teams and customers finalize negotiations and sign contracts. Yet understanding what happens in winning presentations is somewhat of an enigma.

“It’s a mystery wrapped in a riddle inside an enigma,”

— from the movie JFK



That quote describes customers as well as sales teams in B2B presentations. Customers are there under a false belief: They think they’re assessing the merits of the proposed sales solutions.

In reality the merits of competing sales teams’ RFP responses have already been reviewed and evaluated by customers. If customers wanted clarification about those responses, they could get it by email, conference call, or web meeting.

No. Customers are rarely, if ever, aware of why they really have in-person presentations from sales teams. And sales teams believe the goal of their presentations is to persuade customers to select them, which is true.

However, sales teams don’t know how to explicitly do that; they lack a model and understanding of what’s really happening. They can’t see themselves in action and must rely on their team’s second-hand impressions of what’s happening, which is biased by being in the presentation themselves.





There's so much going on for both sides during presentations that it's difficult to understand what's really happening. As a result, presentations are truly a *"mystery wrapped in a riddle inside an enigma."*

So here, based on my experience in hundreds of sales presentations, is a SWAG at decoding the enigma of sales presentations.

It Takes A Trifecta

Sales presentations provide customers the opportunity to road test potential relationships before they make their final decision.

Customers want to experience what it might be like working with a particular sales team as their future supplier. That's the subtext for customers' sitting through sales presentations. And to accomplish that road test, customers assess how likeable, credible, and culturally aligned their potential choice may be. Therefore, sales teams compete against one another where...

The Presentation Trifecta is:



1
Likeability



2
Credibility



3
Affinity

These are the three must win positions for sales teams: Win, place, and show. For customers to select a sales team to advance to the next step in their buying process, the sales team must achieve number one or two in each position relative to their competition.

Makes sense, doesn't it?

Customers don't want to work with people they hate... or whom they don't believe... or who may embarrass them by saying or doing the wrong thing in their company's culture.





Attributes That Contribute To The Presentation Trifecta

While there are many generalized articles on how to become more likeable and more credible, there's more to the Presentation Trifecta than win, place, and show. There are attributes that contribute to being picked the winner for those three positions.

While some attributes make stronger contributions than others to Likeability or Credibility, all of them, when properly researched and applied, add up to a big win for matching customers' cultural Affinity.



Assigning Attributes to the Presentation Trifecta

The following table is not an exhaustive list of attributes but covers the primary ones for each Trifecta position; your experience and attributes may vary.

Attributes	Presentation Trifecta		
	Likeability	Credibility	Affinity
Articulateness 		✓	✓
Body Language	✓		✓
Ease with Challenge-Conflict	✓	✓	✓
Conciseness 		✓	✓
Empathy	✓		✓
Gracefulness 	✓		✓
Grooming/Clothing	✓		✓
Humility	✓		✓
Humor 	✓		✓
Meaningfulness 	✓	✓	✓
Passion		✓	✓
Personal Manners	✓		✓
Technical Smarts 		✓	✓

 Good slideshow decks strengthen these attributes





How-To Win the Presentation Trifecta

The following attributes are presented from the sales team's perspectives, and are not in order of importance but in alphabetical order only. Master these aspects of your sales team's performance, and customers will be falling over themselves to select your team as their supplier.

Articulateness: the sales team's ability to communicate their value proposition in a clear and distinct business narrative. If sales teams tell their story straight and true, they'll be perceived as credible potential suppliers.

However, you may have already suffered through the painful opposite of articulateness, which are flubbed answers, embarrassing anecdotes, and incriminating faux pas.

Besides rehearsal, insightful sales intel helps win the day here.

Body Language: being aware of postures and making confident movements helps connect with customers, communicating assurance and ease. Sales teams don't have to do much here but be aware of their own and avoid sending the wrong signals, e.g., arms folded across the chest, nervous hand tapping, leaning back from customers when they're speaking, etc.

One tactic is to subtly mirror the customer's' body language, e.g., if the customer speaking leans forward, so does the sales team, if the customer speaking leans back, so does the sales team. This will take some sensitivity and practice to avoid looking like a choreographed caricature of customer movements.

Ease with Challenge – Conflict: how sales teams deal with difficult questions or challenging customers speaks volumes about a potential customer-supplier relationship.

Customers are looking to see how sales teams handle themselves, whether they'd throw someone under the bus, or stand up and be accountable. Sales teams must:

- Avoid reacting defensively
- Answer straightforwardly
- Accept responsibility
- Communicate learnings and corrections as appropriate

If there's a fire fight, only the sales team loses.





Conciseness: something as simple as answering questions with simple, clear answers (*with an appropriate level of depth and detail*) is huge. Customers don't want to sit through a sales team's long-winded, blowhard answers. They want information short, sweet, and accurate.



Rehearsal will help sales teams get their individual answers down to 60 seconds or less. This is more than enough information for customers, as they can ask follow up questions if they want more detail.

Empathy: without sounding like the movie trailer for Old Yeller, sales teams want to find opportunities to express their emotional understanding of customers' situations at the business, departmental, and personal level.

First and foremost, empathy starts with genuinely listening to what customers say.

The next step is to include business stories that highlight human consequences and how the sales team and/or its company brought about positive outcomes.



Gracefulness: being graceful in presentations doesn't mean the sales team wears ballet tutus. It does mean rehearsing enough so that the hand-off from one sales speaker to another is done without stepping on toes or embarrassing silences that a truck could drive through or correcting one another's answers.



Grooming/Clothing: about physical appearances; life isn't fair, the world isn't fair, and neither is business. Attractive sales teams have a step up, and that's not fair. Nothing to be done about that; either your team is attractive to look at, or they are not.

However, hairstyles, jewelry, and clothing are choices. For sales presentations, the only imperative is to match your customer's cultural norms. Sales teams dress style must match the customers, e.g., high-tech campus casual, Wall Street finance formal, etc.

Nothing screams "We don't belong here" more than dark suits and ties at a Silicon Valley tech firm. Conversely, can you imagine mohawks and visible tats in an Investment Banker's conference room?



Humility: is the wisdom knowing that everyone is wrong sometimes, that stuff happens, and that there's always a bigger dog somewhere. Humility can be seen as a quiet confidence, knowing that your sales team and your offer are great, while accepting the weaknesses and vulnerabilities that come along for the ride. Know it, own it, and use it.

Humor: oh, the double-edged sword. Getting customers laughing is a good sign for sales teams in almost every instance. And this doesn't only have to come from a funny story or ice breaking joke. Look for opportunities where culturally appropriate visual humor can be included in your slideshow decks.

Be careful, but when you're confident you've got the right take on acceptable humor in the customer's culture, go for it. The dangerous part of humor is when it misses and is seen as culturally incorrect, or even worse, as a sign of desperate and nervous salespeople.

Best advice regarding humor in sales presentations is to be yourself but with your professional face on.





Meaningfulness: is about seeking to connect business concerns to a higher calling. All sales topics must be focused towards customers' business needs, wants and desires. But with meaningfulness, the intent is to connect those business topics to goals or aspirations that have greater meaning than treasure alone. Ideas that business topics can connect to may include beliefs in:

- Hard work that pays off
- Fairness and level-playing fields
- Caring and helping others less well off: we are our brother's keeper

Bringing this level of meaningfulness into sales presentations can create strong connections with customers, showing that we are all similar at some level, sharing common hopes, fears, and joys. And it can only be done by really understanding customers as individuals, along with their company values and culture – and genuinely caring about those values oneself.

Passion: in presentations, is for the sales team to show a strong enthusiasm for producing the customer's desired outcomes. And like humor, can be a double-edged sword.

Customers commonly want suppliers to be excited about their work, but overly passionate sales teams can end up looking like hyper-emotional cheerleaders, which hurts their credibility.

Therefore, sales teams must find selected moments when they can communicate their passion in an intelligent manner, and avoid sending the wrong message. The balance of the presentation can be done in cooler, quiet confidence.

Personal Manners: while there may not be a set of universally correct manners (they can vary by generation and culture), getting them right is essential for sales teams to align with customers culturally and be liked by them too.

When sales teams miss those cues, such as not opening doors, or interrupting, or behaving in an overly familiar manner, the disrespect can sink a presentation faster than snow on a red hot skillet. Forget the great price and spectacular value proposition – the sale is toast.





Technical Smarts: this is when sales teams include power Subject Matter Experts (SME's) -- ones that customers are in awe of. Credibility hangs on the interactions when sales teams get technical with customers.

And as you'd guess, one misstep and it's virtually impossible to regain. Therefore, sales teams should always include the vital few, well-rehearsed, relevant SMEs to carry the presentation at these points. Or blow your credibility out of the water, never to be seen again.



Summary

The goal of a sales team in a presentation is to get the customer to select them for the next and final step of negotiation and contract execution.

But the path there is as much an enigma for customers as it is for sales teams.

The Presentation Trifecta directs sales teams to strive for first or second position in Likeability, Credibility, and Affinity, relative to the competition. Once achieved, customers will select them and move into the final stage, and happy days are ahead.

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