



The Sales Persuasion Playbook

5 Secrets to Successful Calls



Introduction

Who was the first sales representative? Was it a weary Neanderthal peddling sheep's wool? Was it an entrepreneurial Australopithecus trying to maximize the recurring revenue on her stockpile of seeds?

Either way, it's been established across generations of sales representatives:

The persuasive ones see better results.

And despite the widespread adoption of various messaging apps and alternatives, the phone remains one of the most important and persuasive sales tools. Voice can display empathy, understanding, patience, and knowledge faster (and often better) than more passive methods.

This is why, especially in today's world of indirect communication channels, sales reps must learn to quickly initiate conversations, intrigue an audience, and prove the value of their products. More than just a useful life skill, on-the-phone experience is a valuable way for professionals to distinguish themselves from their peers and advance their careers.

In this guide, we'll discuss soft skills, concrete tools, and pre-call preparation required for consistently successful sales calls.



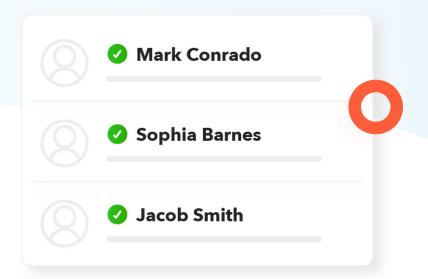
Do Your Homework

Would you challenge someone to a game of chess before learning the rules? Would you show up to a wedding without knowing the bride's name? If a stranger shoved something under your nose and said "eat this," would you do it?

Extroversion and improvisation can be an advantage when making calls, but the best sales reps don't wager success on such factors. That's because they know **research** holds the key to lucrative conversations.

The bank of relevant context you can build prior to a call is a critical safety net. You'll never know which 20% is impactful until you're on the call, but you'll be glad you have 100% of the research in your back pocket just in case.

Consider your own buying processes. Although the amount of information brands seem to know about your traits and habits may be slightly concerning, you do ultimately prefer and prioritize relevant product offers.



It's the job of a good sales rep, then, to find out why their product is a good fit for a prospect and what benefits they can expect to enjoy.

This means learning as much as possible about your target audience segment, but also gleaning whatever you can about the specific individuals to whom you're selling.

Great sales agents know how to outmaneuver gatekeepers and find the important people within an organization. In other words, the ones with purchase authority.

Finding this invaluable info requires keen eyes and smart tools. ZoomInfo and LeadIQ, for example, are two popular tools for identifying email addresses, phone numbers, and company information from Linkedin profiles and other webpages.



It's also helpful to look at a prospect's career progression.

What positions have they held in the past? How might these positions inform their buying and thinking habits today?

Is your prospect active on social media? Do they maintain a professional or personal blog? It's a good idea to run your prospect's name through a Google news search. This could identify other personality traits, and create personable talking points when building a working relationship.

Google News

Q Search for your prospect

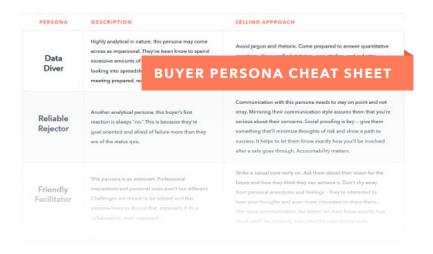
From this research, you'll need to form a gameplan on how to approach your prospect. What do you think they care about most? What buzzwords will pique their interest and help them move to next steps?

Some buyers will fall into an analytical persona and request concrete evidence of the value you can add to their operation. Others will require a more emotional spin. They'll want to know they can trust you – that you'll be an advisor and a mentor through the purchasing process and beyond. These buyers thrive on relationships and must be respected accordingly.

TIP

Consistently record these observations in your CRM system. Your whole team will appreciate this supplemental info during future sales and customer support interactions.

A lot of times, these judgments have to be made in the moment. To stay in control of your conversation, we've created a buyer persona cheat sheet (see below). As a buyer persona breakdown, this grid simplifies buyers into four categories with directions on how to close the deal with each one.





But before the call even begins, you can take proactive steps to make sure you're prospect is in the right mindset to consider your points.

Professionals strive to be in control of their businesses and schedules. Not only is it polite, it's a business best practice to send your prospect a high level meeting agenda a day or two before you're scheduled to speak.

Of course, cold callers won't have the luxury of this preliminary contact, but if you do have this option, it's yet another way to gather information and learn more about your customers' personalities.

For instance, was the reception to your email welcome? Did they immediately have follow up questions? Was there a response at all? Did they use exclamation points in their response? How many? More than 4?!?!

Persona research requires a socially acute mind and an eye for detail. You'll be able to make important insights based off your prospects' degrees, previous positions, and hobbies, as well as the manner in which they communicate.

So long as you act professionally and treat your leads with respect, initially assuming the wrong buyer persona strategy doesn't spell "doomsday" for your pitch. However, choosing the right strategy will immediately endear you to the prospect, and increase your sales velocity.





Buyer Persona Cheat Sheet

PERSONA	DESCRIPTION	SELLING APPROACH
Data Diver	Highly analytical in nature, this persona may come across as impersonal. They've been know to spend excessive amounts of time crunching numbers and looking into spreadsheets. They'll come to every meeting prepared, ready to ask detailed questions.	Avoid jargon and rhetoric. Come prepared to answer quantitative questions. Have verified statistics, case studies, and industry research nearby. A follow up email with accurate information is more valuable than imprecise numbers in the moment.
Reliable Rejector	Another analytical persona, this buyer's first reaction is always "no." This is because they're goal oriented and afraid of failure more than they are of the status quo.	Communication with this persona needs to stay on point and not stray. Mirroring their communication style assures them that you're serious about their concerns. Social proofing is key – give them something that'll minimize thoughts of risk and show a path to success. It helps to let them know exactly how you'll be involved after a sale goes through. Accountability matters.
Friendly Facilitator	This persona is an extrovert. Professional interactions and personal ones aren't too different. Challenges are meant to be solved, and this persona loves to do just that, especially if it's a collaborative, team approach.	Strike a casual tone early on. Ask them about their vision for the future and how they think they can achieve it. Don't shy away from personal anecdotes and feelings - They're interested to hear your thoughts and even more interested to share theirs. The more communication, the better, let them know exactly how much you'll be involved, even after the sales funnel ends.
Enthusiastic Entrepreneur	This persona is opinionated and outspoken. Tradition and decorum aren't very important. However, they're also people-pleasers who thrive on committed working relationships. After all, it's because of these relationships that they're able to delegate smaller tasks - which they do quite often.	Start by selling the big picture, whether that be increased productivity, better communication, or simplified costs, etc. This persona moves fast, so always be summarizing and eliciting buy-in. They're attracted to things that are adaptable, so sell versatility and multi-functionality. Let them know you're a partner that'll stick around even after the sale goes through.

Map Your Strengths and Weaknesses

Regardless of how wonderfully unique your product may be, it's unlikely that it'll be a perfect fit for every prospect. Obviously, you want to target buyers who match your ideal customer profile. Aiming beyond this perimeter tends to have negative consequences in the form of low success rates, wasted efforts, and large concessions. You may make the sale in the short-term, but misaligned expectations inevitably shorten long-term value.

The good news is, most buyers aren't expecting perfection – just a reliable solution to their top priorities. It's your job as a sales representative to discover and promote the ways in which your product can help the prospect reach their goals.

But equally as important is your ability to recognize your product's shortcomings. It's not necessary for you to lie, or even to try to cover up these flaws. Rather, using your deep industry research and product knowledge, you can help your prospect learn how to use the product, with other potential workarounds, to achieve the result they're looking for. Honesty and transparency themselves are **highly persuasive** sales tactics.

Product One	Product Two
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In other words, it's your job to persuade the prospect that your product's advantages far outweigh the weaknesses when it comes to helping them achieve their end goals. Perhaps benefits include increased productivity, or maybe the money they'll save by purchasing your product can cover the cost of supplemental tools.

It's also a good strategy to describe how current customers are enjoying your product in a similar capacity. Show them that any shortcomings in what you're selling will not negatively affect their goals in the long run.

Words won't always be enough though. Diagrams, illustrations, videos, and user testimonials will support your suggestions. That is to say, the sales enablement materials you use are an invaluable resource to ease concerns about potential shortcomings.



Sales enablement is your team's bridge between product, marketing, and sales. It's persuasive and targeted marketing specifically for leads who have already progressed toward the lower portions of your sales funnel. Here, you can skip the awareness factor and jump straight to affinity.

Brand positioning and other qualitative points are still important, but sales enablement materials often have a quantitative and direct nature to them.

The goal is to convince rather than to attract.

These materials have a three-part function:

- To persuade a prospect toward change
- To make selecting the right solution easier
- To help them justify their own decision

Creating sales enablement material doesn't need to be a burdensome process. On the next page, here's a list of the top materials sales representatives need to combat product weaknesses and persuade hesitant prospects.



Sales Enablement Marketing Materials

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Competitor Feature Comparisons

Best presented in an "apples-to-apples" table format. If your company is producing this document, you can showcase your product's selling points, but be sure to give a full picture of all features.



Competitor Pricing Comparisons

Finding this information – and keeping it up-to-date – is the hard part. Almost all prospects will ask about price early on, and this document can do a lot to ease worries.



Customer Storiesby Industry

Publicly accessible customer stories are a great way to provide and in-depth look at how your product's users are experiencing success. Blogs and testimonials are excellent, but video is an emerging favorite.



Industry Research

Nothing speaks louder than numbers. If your product's selling proposition is supported by independent research, distribute these documents widely.



Case Studies

Similar to customer stories, case studies will go more in depth into how your product is currently being used. This will involve statistical analysis and intimate access to your users' operations. May require legal approval.



Product Video Tutorials

If simplicity, productivity, or UX is part of your selling scheme, show (don't tell) your prospects how it's done. Short (2-3 minute) tutorials and demos can be shared via email and social media as follow ups and lead nurturing material.



Related Blogs/eBooks

Classic content marketing – your blogs and ebooks don't have to relate to your product in a direct way. The goal here is to provide knowledge and create brand affinity. Often thought of as a pre-salesfunnel tactic, this shouldn't be abandoned after the marketing-sales handoff.

It's good to lay everything out on the table. Your prospect, more than anything, wants to make an informed and correct decision.

Transparency goes a long way to establishing trust and a good working relationship.

Anticipate Objections

If a sales representative gets blindsided by a common objection – relating to pricing, timelines, features, etc. – then preparation is likely to blame.

Combining your prospect research and product knowledge, you can develop a comprehensive list of potential objections and corresponding solutions.

In fact, it's sometimes better to be proactive about objections. Sales representatives that raise objections themselves avoid the (often) fatal misstep of waiting until the final stages to address deal-delaying concerns.

Good inquiries to ask periodically throughout the sales process

- ? Is there anything you can see that would stop us from moving forward?
- ? Do you have any concerns about (feature/requirement/process)?
- ? Do you think (proposed solution) can help you achieve your goal?

You must have the mentality that all objections are all valid. Each qualm should be treated with respect and formality. Never condescension. (Sometimes it's nice to just to hear a point affirmed by another person, even if it's obvious.)

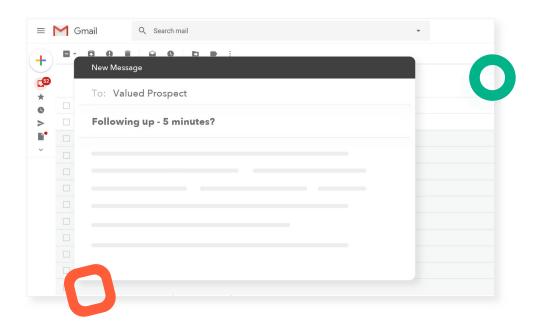
It helps to know the difference between **objections and brush offs**.

Objections

Objections are indicators that your prospect is taking the purchasing process seriously. These will include genuine concerns related to price, features, or implementation. Objections deserve thoughtful and accurate responses.

Brush Offs

Brush offs, however, are the prospect telling you they do not want to speak and are entirely uninterested. These may be rude in nature, but also shouldn't cause any alarm. When they occur, try to postpone the conversation until it's appropriate (or pursue a separate contact).



But while many objections can be straightforward ("Why is your product more expensive than the competition?"), some will be shrouded in covert language.

In other words, many objections can't be taken at face value. A prospect may say one thing, but mean another. Successful sales reps know how to see through these objections, and get to the crux of the issue. If you can successfully do this, not only will it help move the sales process along, it'll create a sense of empathy and bond between the prospect and your brand.

Finding the true meaning in an objection can be considered an innate skill, but more often it's a familiarity with the sales terrain and having experienced all the common objections before.

Despite all preparations, it's possible that there is no response to the objections. If there's really nothing you can do, there are a few ways to end a conversation professionally, with dignity, and most importantly, in a way that leaves open the possibility of a future conversation.

If there's really nothing to be done, you can:

- Ask if they foresee a time in the future where the product may be of use
- Find out who at the organization does have the authority to make purchasing decisions
- Help the prospect form a persuasive argument to present to their managers

For tactical help on combating common obstacles, HubSpot has published on objections and how to overcome them. Many of the objections are made for similar reasons, turning these objections around and addressing the main issues promptly will prevent any concerns from lingering, and help you close the deal faster.

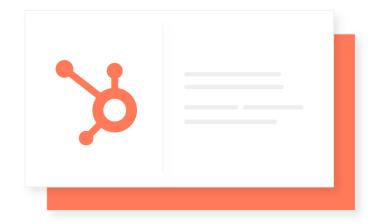
Making a Personal Connection

Once you get a prospect on the phone, your conversation will flow better (and less awkwardly) if you present yourself as likable and trustworthy. As a learning tool, we can branch out to other areas where agreeability and vocal authority matter.

Public speaking and job interviewing are two settings where persuasion and likability count extra. When taking these into consideration, we can piece together what makes someone sound relatable and generally like a "real" person, over the phone.

For one, like speaking in front of large groups, talking to strangers on the phone creates a "performance zone." The sole focus on one's voice causes them to talk more than normal. As a result, we often times feel the need to avoid silences and fill the voids with rambling "umms" or "errs."

In reality, this habit comes across uncertain, unknowledgeable, and disingenuous. Instead of filling pauses with ambient noise or repetition, silence – if not too prolonged – is far preferable.



And as a general rule, most people can stand to slow down a bit when they speak. Even if you're talking slower than you would in casual conversation, this will help you regulate your thoughts, focus on your tone, and present a coherent message.

We've already touched on the importance of preparation, but in a sense, you don't want to be too prepared. That is to say, a good sales rep should always know what they're going to say, but memorization and verbatim lines will come across as prepackaged.

After a while, seasoned sales representatives won't need a script or other cues to deliver an on-point and effective message, but in the beginning, broad bullet points are the best way to go. Exact wording will vary from rep to rep, but that's okay – small indicators of personality will help you appear more human.

Technically, the phone takes away any visual elements to your message. However, **as many speech coaches will attest**, there's a strong correlation between body language, movement, and vocal inflection.

When making a call, experiment with different environments and physical postures. If you want to appear energetic, considering taking the call while walking around a quiet space. Do you want to appear casual? Reclining and smiling will help set the scene – emotionally.

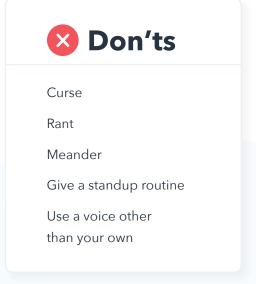
The tone you use is an important tool when establishing a working relationship. After building a persona for your intended prospect, think of someone in your own life who might match that description. Is it a parent, a friend, a supervisor? Use the same attitude when speaking to your lead, and the right messaging will follow.

Remember, nobody is perfect, and humility can be just as admirable as authority. Like in a job interview, you'll want to acknowledge your weaknesses. Failing to do so will make you seem artificial, and make your product seem too good to be true.

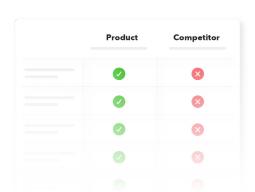
If you're ever confronted with a difficult objection, a quick laugh, acknowledgement, and honest attempt at finding a workaround will build more trust than a deflection, excuse, or half-baked response. In fact, not knowing the answer to a question presents another opportunity for future conversation.

To supplement these performance-pointers, it's often said that "storytelling" is a great way to entice prospects and help them "feel" the benefit of your product rather than just hearing it. When it comes to storytelling, **The Moth** is a renowned venue where people from all backgrounds tell gripping and entertaining stories. Event organizers now kindly provide these **tips to aspiring presenters**.





While these tips may seem abstract, they hold true for sales reps giving pitches. Dos and don'ts worth another mention are:



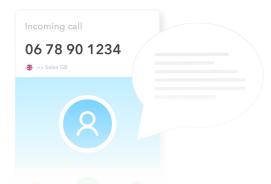
There must be stakes

If there weren't, why should the prospect be interested in purchasing your product over another? Will your product increase productivity? Is it cheaper? Make it very clear what your prospect stands to lose by going with another option (and to gain from yours).



It must fit the time limit

Staying on point is essential to any professional interaction, but especially on a call. If your pitch is too long, or if you're asking too many high-level questions, you'll begin to lose face with the prospect. Make the points you need and collect the information necessary to move them along in the sales process.



Give a standup routine

Humor is often hit-or-miss, particularly when the audience isn't expecting it. It pays to be friendly and (at times) playful, but this isn't the time or place to try out elaborate jokes. If they don't land, you risk alienating your prospect and appearing unprofessional.

Making a personal connection with your prospect will mean finding the right balance between casual and formal. Draw from your research and choose which balance will work best, but stay present in case you need to make any adjustments mid-call.



Active Listening

The best sales reps aren't always the best talkers. Many would argue that listening takes priority over their speaking. That is to say, if you're listening in the correct way, you're persuading and learning at the same time.

Active listening has been defined as "the practice of listening to a speaker while providing feedback indicating that the listener both hears and understands what the speaker is saying."

This process can be broken down into three important steps for the listener:

COMPREHENDING

RETAINING

RESPONDING



COMPREHENSION

Comprehension should be easy for sales reps. If you're on the phone with a prospect, you should have already done your research. You should know approximately what their use case is, and why your product is a good fit. Almost everything they tell you should resonate and reinforce your research.

However, your mind should be present in the moment. If a prospect is telling you about their needs and circumstances, getting a credit card number should be the last thing on your mind.

Listen to their words and try to imagine yourself in their position. Think about the stressors they experience, and what success would feel like to them. This will invariably help guide your selling process in a clear direction.

RETAINING

Retaining this information is a bit harder, since active sales reps will take many calls throughout a busy day. Luckily, the information you gather from call-to-call can (and should) be recorded via your CRM notes and other shared files.

On-call note taking should be brief in nature. Agents may find in helpful to jot down short follow up questions to engage and flesh-out certain talking points. After each call ends, however, agents should dedicate time to recording everything they can recall about the conversation. This info will include concrete details about the prospect's purchasing timeline and use case, but also qualitative elements, such as whether or not they seemed hesitant, confident, skeptical, etc.

Most phone systems today also have some sort of call recording feature (usually for legal reasons, but potentially useful for internal purposes). High performing sales reps regularly review their calls to improve recollection, prepare for future calls, and even critique their selling process

RESPONDING

Responding is part and parcel to what makes active listening so effective. By reacting appropriately as a listener, you're letting the speaker know that you're engaged and present in the conversation.

Showing you're actively engaged involves two levels of vocal acknowledgement. As your prospect is speaking, the listener should frequently reinforce their authority with statements of positive affirmation. This doesn't mean you necessarily agree with what the speaker is saying, but it shows you're absorbing their words.

Vocal cues that exhibit active listening include statements like, "I see" and "go on," as well as brief paraphrases of what the speaker has just said. These statements should be inserted at natural pauses in the speaker's statements, where they were likely to continue speaking anyway.

At the end of the speaker's completed thoughts, the active listener should continue asking questions, mirroring the language and sentiment of the previous statements. The end goal is that the sales representative can use the prospect's language to ask their own discovery questions. This allows them to collect relevant information while also displaying genuine interest.

Obstacles to Good Active Listening

Showing your prospect that you're attentive and engaged in the conversation will go a long way in building a strong (and persuasive) working relationship, but there are a few easy traps to avoid along the way.

ABANDON THE AGENDA

The end of the month is approaching and you're running slightly behind quota. It's natural to want to push your selling agenda and try to close the deal as soon as possible. However, active listening requires patience and empathy. The focus of this interaction is to try – as best as possible – to understand the prospect's circumstances and put yourself in their shoes.

ASKING THE WRONG QUESTIONS

The primary objective of sales discovery questions is to elicit the most relevant information possible. This builds trust and helps prospects feel like you're a knowledgeable consultant. However, if you ask too many questions, your listener may start to feel interrogated. Yes or no answers reveal a limited amount of information and only serve to cut short what could be a good conversation. Questions based around "Why?" are also perceived as confrontational.

Questions that contribute to the conversation tend to be along the lines of "What are you going to do now?" This portrays you as a receptive audience and give the prospect an opportunity to reveal more information.

MENTAL DRIFT

Active listening depends on an acute awareness of your prospect's words and emotions – It's not just what they say, but how they say it. As such, listeners need to stay present.

But the typical office sales floor isn't usually a palace of tranquility and peace. Technology can help – in the form of noise canceling headphones – but a long term solution is to stay mentally clear and ready to use the empathetic and consultative regions of your brain.

Many sales reps have found that taking scheduled breaks leads to better productivity. Meditation apps are also becoming more prevalent as a useful way to stay mindful throughout busy call schedules.

The eventual purpose of active listening is to build a relationship with your prospects. When they feel you truly understand their business and needs, they'll be far more open to hearing your suggestions on how to improve their day-to-day, especially if it means utilizing the product you're selling.





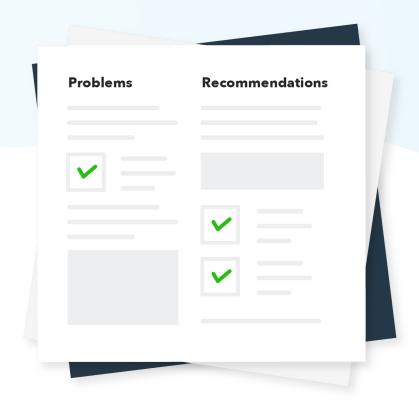
Speaking as an Authority

This is what everything has been building to. If you've done the research, you know how your conversation partner can benefit from the solution you sell. Furthermore, you know what potential weaknesses your product may have, but have anticipated potential objections. Finally, you've built a relationship of trust and understanding with your prospect.

If all has gone according to plan, you're ready to deploy what's come to be known as a consultative selling approach.

In this method, also known as needs-based selling, sales representatives take on the roll of a consultant, aiming first and foremost to help their prospects achieve a desired outcome.

Like active listening, this selling technique requires an altered state of thinking. That is to say, your primary objective shouldn't be a credit card number or a signature on a contract. Not yet. Instead, your conversation should take a tone of genuinely trying to help the prospect achieve superior outcomes.



Obviously, the first place your mind should go, as a motivated sales professional, is to your own product. How – given all that I know about how my product works, and given all that my prospect has told me about their goals – can the product I'm selling assist them?

During this process, you will face objections and roadblocks. As we've covered earlier, you shouldn't position your product as a miraculous, cure-all solution. Acknowledge your minor weaknesses and suggest strategic workarounds where applicable.



Bonus Material: 6 Sneaky Cognitive Biases to Think About

BIAS	DESCRIPTION	WHAT YOU SHOULD DO
Confirmation Bias	Embracing information that supports your existing beliefs over information that doesn't	Provide case studies that show another way of thinking can provide superior results.
Halo Effect	When your holistic impression of a person influences all your beliefs about them.	Be sure to stay professional and employ active listening techniques. This will help you remain "likeable" in a prospect's mind.
Attentional Bias	Paying attention to select pieces of information and ignoring other (potentially more important ones)	Commonly affiliated with pricing. The "sticker" price of a product may be more expensive, but may result in more productivity or savings elsewhere. Direct the prospect toward unforeseen benefits.
Functional Fixedness	Seeing objects as only functioning in the most obvious way.	This bias prevents prospects from identifying workarounds. Study up on the product your selling to show them the way forward.
Sunk Cost Fallacy	Continuing a behavior or (sticking to a mentality) because of a previously made investment.	Prospects will be hesitant to change from an old product to a new one because of financial, or time-related investments. This bias can be mitigated by showing that the benefits of changing will compensate for the loss of resources, time, money, or otherwise.
Ambiguity Aversion	The tendency to avoid options with a low probability of success or have unknown outcomes.	While true of most prospects, this bias will be extra prevalent when speaking to an individuals who are new in a position or industry. The best course of action is to provide statistics of success (when applicable) and redirect them to references and customer stories that show how success is attainable.

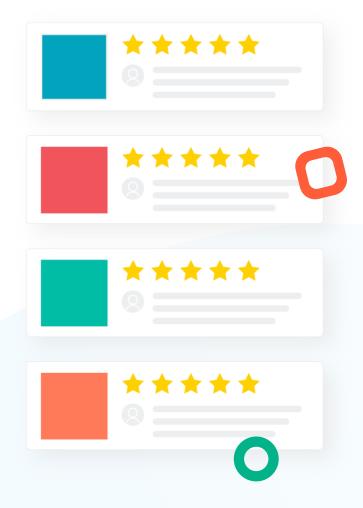
Social proofing is a great tool to employ during this phase – especially if a current customer has had the same issue in the past. How did they solve the issue? Have they still seen superior results? These are the types of reassurances hesitant buyers will appreciate.

But while consultative selling is the primary means of projecting authority, you'll want to come ready with backup. Have your product's sales enablement materials on hand to bolster your points. Be prepared to follow up with case studies, informative blogs, and other qualitative selling points.

In the end though, you will sometimes find that the deal just isn't yet ready to be closed. If this is the case, your consultative approach shouldn't fall off in an instant.

Unless the prospect reveals themself to be a true mismatch for your product, you should avoid recommending your competitors as a solution. Instead continue giving helpful suggestions based on your knowledge of the industry.

Losing any deal near the finish line is tough, but in time, this consultative relationship may still pay off. The prospect's needs will change over time, and sectors will evolve. If you've established a working-relationship of trust through active listening and honest suggestions, there's a good chance your paths may cross again in the future.



FINAL THOUGHT

Persuasion is About Winning More Than the Deal

Despite common sales stereotypes, persuasive selling isn't grounded in slick talk or pushy tactics – it's about being an empathetic conversation partner and expert advisor.

Product knowledge, prospect research, and relationship building are the foundations of a winning deal. This process begins prior to dialing your prospect's number, and long before they've entered your sales funnel.



How Aircall+HubSpot Can Help

Thankfully, you and your fellow sales agents aren't alone in this process. CRMs and integrated communication tools let brand representatives learn (and remember) all the vital information that helps impress leads and win deals. Advanced phone systems, like Aircall, make **calling and documenting every interaction** possible without ever leaving your home base in HubSpot.

By syncing all notes and call recordings to the correct customer profile, plus dialing out from directly within HubSpot, Aircall makes selling over the phone reliable and effective.

When all the steps are followed, you'll be ready to talk business with even the toughest prospect. Once on the phone, it's a matter of...

Staying relaxed

- Listening intently
- Projecting the right attitude
- Aiming to genuinely help

If these criteria are met, you'll be on your way to winning deals and building a powerful professional network.

Learn more about the Aircall<>HubSpot integration here, and check out the HubSpot Service Hub here.

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