

ARTICLE

# Life Beyond the Product Pitch: Why Customers Really Buy

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## Life Beyond the Product Pitch: Why Customers Really Buy

Most would agree that it's easier to win new business from a satisfied customer than it is to acquire a new client. Both present plenty of challenges, but by focusing on our client's "concept" of what they want to fix, accomplish or avoid, we can greatly improve our win rates for new business and generate continued added value for our existing clients.

Indeed, even the savviest strategic marketing and the most aggressive business development efforts could be exercises in futility--unless you approach selling from the standpoint of the client's point of view.

This conceptual approach to selling is a process designed to help you sell more effectively by aligning the way you sell with the way your customers buy. It depends first on understanding your customers' issues--what they are trying to accomplish--and then applying your unique strengths to help them develop suitable solutions.

### **The Starting Point: The Client's Concept**

The concept, or the solution image, is something that develops in the client's mind. It is his attempt to frame a solution for a problem that may or may not have anything to do with what you are selling. The client's concept, which is entirely subjective and different for each prospect, is tied directly to something they want to fix, accomplish or avoid.. We must be crystal clear about what the concept is before presenting any solutions.

The approach you used to gain the client's trust in the first place is the same approach you use to win additional contracts. Keeping your new and existing clients' concepts in mind as the relationships expand bolsters your hard-earned credibility and helps you lock out the competition. You deepen the client relationship and gain more valuable insights into the client's ongoing needs with each completed project.

### **The Challenge: Concepts Are Individual and Dynamic**

It is also important to point out that companies don't have concepts--individuals do. For that matter, different features and benefits may appeal to different decision makers in the chain of command of one company. The salesperson is charged with discovering what the motivating factors are and crafting the solution discussion around meeting those custom needs.

You must be absolutely clear about the client's concept before presenting your solution, and highly selective about how you describe your services with features and benefits that resonate with the client during the sales call.

It's not the product or service that makes or breaks the sale, but the prospect's subjective view of what your solution can do for him.

During a sales call, then, the first order of business is to discover the individual's solution images. The salesperson's job is to address the concepts of each individual who influences the buying process. And, as if that's not challenging enough, you have to take into account that the client's concept is ever-changing and the process of speaking to the solution images could be different from sales call to sales call. The answer to this challenge is to do more listening than talking.

### **Two Ears, One Mouth**

Salespeople are always guilty of talking too much and not listening enough; you have two ears and one mouth, so use them in those proportions. Salespeople can't just do a feature or product dump on a customer. They need to strike a balance between getting and giving information and use their understanding of the clients' concept to determine how your products or services relate to their needs. If salespeople listen, they'll discover the motivation behind why customers really buy. Miller Heiman has discovered that buying motivations are usually tied to one or more of three basic areas: discrepancy, importance or solving a problem.

### **Three Sales Drivers**

#### **1. Discrepancy**

Discrepancy occurs when there is a perceived gap in the client's mind between where he is right now and where he wants to be. That frustration is a catalyst for change. Where a discrepancy exists, the salesperson's goal is to probe and listen well enough to truly understand the customer's issue. If a potential client is content with his current situation, then there's no way he will expect you to deliver results that will improve upon it. If there is no discrepancy, then there is no sale.

#### **2. Importance**

Importance is another key sales driver. The salesperson needs to ask questions to discern the level of importance the client places on a task. If the client is only vaguely dissatisfied with the status quo, then the trigger doesn't hold enough tension to fire off change.

If the client doesn't view the problem as a priority, then your creative solution to his complex problem won't be enough to ignite action. However, if the client does have an urgent problem and you can provide the solution image, then circumstances are strong for winning new business.

### 3. Solving a Problem

Clients are most likely to buy in growth or trouble modes. In trouble mode, the client is failing to achieve the desired business goal--there is a discrepancy. Likewise, in growth mode, there is a gap between where the client is and where he wants to go. The driver is the quest to improve operations.

Trouble mode could be a CEO who is behind in meeting revenue or profit targets and needs to get back on track. Growth mode could be a sales VP who is doing well but who knows the market is ripe for a new product or service. There is more urgency in trouble mode, and how keen the prospect is on buying depends on how much trouble there is.

It's like a driver who is dissatisfied with his car, but doesn't take steps to upgrade to the model his heart desires until it starts to break down. When the driver is no longer willing to tolerate paying mechanic bills to fix the problems, he'll take action to buy a new vehicle.

Even if the driver's problem is not severe enough to leave him stranded on the side of the road waiting for a tow truck, the salesperson may still be able to sell to the driver's solution image if he can demonstrate that the new vehicle will help him avoid a problem in the future.

### Understanding Concepts Creates a Win-Win

Of course, the goal of any sales process is to create a win-win. Sometimes a win for the client is based on achieving personal goals. A sales vice president gets his business results by hitting revenue targets, but the personal reasons for hitting those targets could vary from individual to individual. It could be that he is looking to buy a bigger home for his family, seeking a promotion at work, or just trying to keep his job. The salesperson's task, once again, is to consider the personal win in order to offer products or services that will drive results and achieve the client's goal.

In doing so, you create a win-win that is based on realities rather than assumptions. Assumptions can be dangerous. The effective salesperson always determines upfront what the client wants from the meeting--and also understands his own needs--so he can be on the same page with the client. That goes for first-time meetings as well as for the existing customers you meet several times a year. Priorities

change, problems change, potential solutions change, and competition changes.

### Consultative Selling Is Not Enough

In today's competitive market, it is not enough for us to approach potential clients in a consultative manner. Gaining a true understanding of client issues and priorities requires a conceptual approach to selling. By focusing on the client's concept, you are assured of a client-centric approach that is by definition results-oriented. Selling is really all about what the client is trying to fix, accomplish or avoid, and understanding this clearly and precisely will help us sell more effectively.

## About Miller Heiman

Miller Heiman has been a thought leader and innovator in the sales arena for almost thirty years, helping clients worldwide win high-value complex deals, grow key accounts and build winning sales organizations.

The company is headquartered in Reno, Nevada and has offices around the world. More information can be obtained by visiting the company's website at: [www.millerheiman.com](http://www.millerheiman.com).