

Plan B Selling?

Why Preparing Two Presentations is Better for Your Career than Preparing Just One, and When to Walk Away

Has this ever happened to you during a sales presentation meeting? Maybe the traffic didn't cooperate, meetings were running late, people called in sick, people you didn't expect to be there are in the room, or the equipment didn't work.

Now, if you want to immediately lower your chances of a successful presentation you can try to cram your entire presentation into the time remaining to you, or spend countless wasted minutes playing with equipment.

Or, you can be ready with your backup plans, be prepared with options on how to proceed, and be confident enough to stick with the decision and move forward.

What to do if it's the customer's fault

Option #1: If you have a very complex meeting presentation planned and it looks like the obstacles or constraints are too great to assure success, and the issues are from the customer's side- the easy answer is to reschedule.

If the customer is unwilling or claims they are unable to reschedule...

Think about this- Experience should tell you that either you don't have all the background information you need to succeed and are operating at a disadvantage, or that you are not being seriously considered.

Unless you can figure out the cause of the customer's unwillingness to reschedule and you believe the reasons are reasonable and legitimate- your chances of winning the business are probably poor. You should thank them; ask them to keep you in mind if circumstances change, pack up and move on.

The next option is appropriate when the issues are yours (or your team's), or when the issue is the customer's and you feel you have all the information you need to believe they are acting in good faith.

Option #2: Know what is critical for this meeting and be prepared to present only that information. Be ready to leave behind material or agree to deliver the rest of the detail in an agreed upon time frame.

If everything goes well, customers will contact you to fill-in any blanks and cover topics of interest in more detail.

You're thinking that you don't have time to create and rehearse multiple presentations. However, you do have the ability to think through and prepare for using only 1 of every 5 slides in your deck and to modify your talking points to address the most important purpose of the meeting.

Think of it this way; just because you have two hours for a meeting, it doesn't mean you have to fill two hours with presentation material. It also doesn't mean you need to become a speed-talker just because you were allotted only 15-minutes.

The really interesting thing about this option is that you may find you are regularly able to give a 45-minute presentation in 15-minutes, leaving more time for questions at the meeting. Practicing this technique regularly can give you time in the day to make more calls, write more letters, make more presentations.

And, no one ever complained about a meeting taking less time than it was scheduled for, or not having to sit in the dark for two hours during another PowerPoint™ presentation.

How to modify your presentation based on the constraints of equipment and time for a successful meeting.

Every meeting is a unique experience. You may be the sole representative of your company, the group leader or a member of the team. However, there are several things that are generally consistent. You probably follow a defined agenda (routine) that could include:

- introductions,
- who you represent,
- background for the meeting,
- purpose of the meeting, and
- overview of the agenda,

Depending on the purpose of the meeting you either launch into:

- analysis or
- discussion of features and benefits, maybe
- demonstrations,
- Q&A and
- close.

Overcome Equipment and Time Issues

Most sales teams today work in a virtual environment, rarely getting together in person for very long before a presentation meeting. These teams get together and prepare for the meeting using phone, e-mail and slide presentations. And those slide presentations become the foundation of the customer presentation.

But what if the projector is broken when you get to the meeting? Or your laptop crashed that morning? Or the room is too bright.

The obvious thing to do is have print copies ready and multiple electronic copies of the presentation, including on a thumb drive and to carry a spare projector.

The less obvious, and potentially more rewarding course of action is to be able to put your presentation on a flip chart. This forces you to be succinct and strong in your messaging. It also has the likely advantage of being different from every other presentation your customer sees.

Let me tell you a story to illustrate the power of this alternative.

I once prepared a slide presentation, going as far as formatting for color, columns and content for weeks before an important presentation for a Top 10 customer where the company I represented really needed the outcome we were shooting for as part of an overall re-fit strategy.

I shared that presentation via e-mail with my executives and gathered their input. I held several teleconference meetings walking through the content with everyone from my company who would be attending.

The thing is, I NEVER INTENDED TO USE THE ELECTRONIC SLIDE SHOW. I never intended to print out the presentation. I planned to print out an agenda with a section for taking notes. If the customer wanted a presentation copy, I would e-mail it to all attendees after the meeting.

I used the slide show to plan, organize, tighten up the presentation, and review with my colleagues. Then, I transferred the presentation by hand, using colored magic markers to flip charts that stick to the wall. Each slide became a flip chart page. When I did this, a couple of things happened-

- I was forced to edit out truly extraneous material
- I couldn't rely on clip art and computer generated graphs
- I knew the material backwards and forwards
- Benefits and comparisons that fit on a single slide required multiple flip chart pages I was able to hang on the wall one beneath the other giving the presentation a much greater impact.
- The customer knew I put time into the meeting preparation
- The content took on new significance
- We won the business before that meeting ended

The presentation remained on the wall for months after our meeting. In fact, when someone questioned the executive project leader why they were doing this particular project, the project leader would escort that person to the room where the presentation was hanging, point to the wall and say, "That's why."

Whether or not you have technical problems, preparing your presentation as though all you have available is a flip chart will prepare you to understand what is most important to cover should your time be cut short. Your presentation will be shorter, stronger, have greater significance and you will be more prepared.

When there is equipment failure or unanticipated time constraints- You have the advantage of having solved a problem before it was known to be a problem. You will also be developing a critical thinking skill- targeting what's really important to win.

To win more business, you need be prepared. You need to be a problem-solver for your customers... sometimes before they know they have a problem.

Be the Hero,
Mark

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