

**FOCUS
REPORT**

Improved Sales Presentations





Sell With Your Gut and Get Out of a Rut

The most effective sales presentations result from an understanding of the customer and how to reach them emotionally

BY PAUL NOLAN

Mike Parkinson, a communication and presentation consultant, tells the story about the time a pest controller rang his doorbell to tell him that since he was in the neighborhood, he could offer him an excellent deal on spraying for bugs. Mike declined (at least three times) despite the salesman's insistence about the great price he was able to offer and the concern that, since he had sprayed the neighbors' lawns, the bugs would migrate to Mike's yard.

The road to any sale has two gates, Parkinson explains, and the salesperson at his door failed to pass through either one of them.

Catalyst and Choice

The first gate is catalyst, and it consists of three components, at least one of which must be present for a sale to be made:

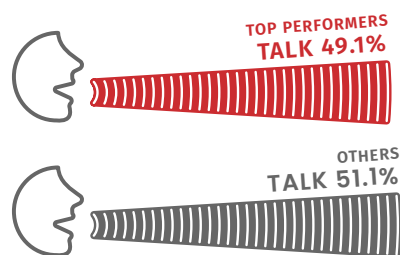
- **Pain** – Pain triggers many buying decisions, and the pain of change cannot exceed the pain of maintaining the status quo.
- **Gain** – Simply put, what's in it for the buyer?
- **Fear** – The fear of loss is up to 2.5 times more powerful as a motivator than pain or gain, yet it's a negative motivator that Parkinson avoids.

FEATURE STORY

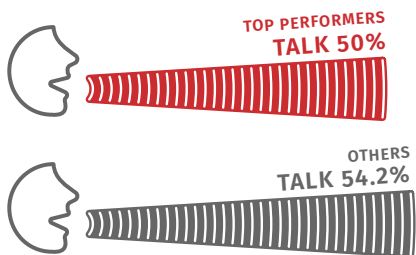
The second gate is choice. It, too, has three components:

- **Trust** – Any transaction requires the seller to develop trust.
- **Ego** – You can go down a deep Freudian hole when researching how ego is tied to buying decisions; suffice to say that buyers hopefully make B2B buying decisions with confidence that they are helping their company.
- **Value** – Buyers want a good product or service at a price that is fair.

Top performers don't necessarily talk less, but they get prospects talking way more.



Discovery Calls



Presentations

BEST PRACTICE ▶

Top performers are more persuasive.

What's more, Parkinson adds, the pest controller leapt directly into his sales pitch before fully understanding Parkinson's situation. If he had started with a question or two, he would have quickly discovered that Parkinson had an existing contract with a different pest controller company that he was satisfied with. There was no pain point – and nothing to be gained.

CHARTS – SOURCE: ALLEGO – "BEST PRACTICES OF TOP-PERFORMING SALES REPS"

A thorough understanding of a prospect allows a sales rep to develop what Parkinson calls an "HFB Mind Map" – hopes, fears and biases. "It makes it easier to empathize with a prospect and understand what will motivate them to move forward," he said.

Emotions Close Deals

Parkinson points out that of the six bullet points under his two gates to a sale, five weigh entirely on emotions. Value is the only component in which the manual part of the brain gets involved. Successful marketing strategies – and the sales presentations they hatch – appeal to the emotional side of the brain as much if not more than the rational side.

In a [blog about the emotional aspect of B2B sales](#), Rob Mitchell, CEO of FT Longitude, a marketing services division of the *Financial Times*, says the characteristics of complex B2B sales – buying teams, long sales cycles and substantial price points – suggest that B2B buying decisions are more rational than B2C. The reality is that emotions and the subconscious play significant roles in B2B sales, Mitchell states.

"More subjective elements, such as reducing anxiety or providing hope and inspiration for the future, really matter most to B2B buyers – not the features and benefits of the product," Mitchell states. He emphasizes that marketers and sales reps need to think about how they can form an emotional

Top performers' discovery calls are 76% longer and presentation calls are 55% longer.



Discovery Calls



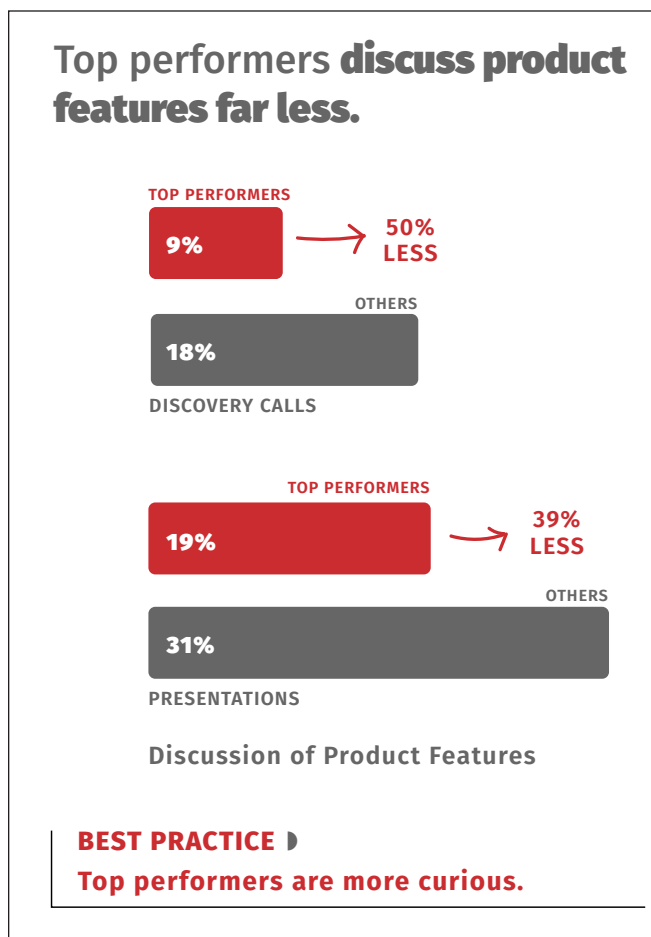
Presentations

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Top performers are more engaging.

FEATURE STORY

connection with their audience. “In the B2B context, this means focusing on factors such as reassurance, optimism, confidence, vision for the future and empathy for the buyer’s business problems.” (See sidebar on page 5.)



Don't Bury the Lead

Those sentiments are echoed by Robert J. Weese, managing partner with B2B Sales Connections, an executive leadership consultancy. “Salespeople need to follow the same rule as reporters: Don't bury the lead,” he told SMM in an email exchange.

Prospects anchor their thoughts on the first piece of information that resonates with them. Weese warns that if a sales rep spends 10 or even five minutes reviewing non-critical information that does not directly relate to the outcome the customer can expect from a product or service, they risk losing their interest. (You may be proud of your company’s history, but how important is it to your prospects?)

“Too many sales presentations start with the salesperson telling the customer about their business and themselves. They fail to capture the buyer’s attention in the first few seconds,” Weese said. “Salespeople tend to present a shopping list of features of the product/service with the hope the customer will put up their hand and say, ‘I’m interested in that.’”

Weese recalls a client whose reps started every sales presentation with a 10-minute tale about the history of the company hoping to engender trust. “I changed their presentation intro to a question: ‘How important would it be if you could increase your net revenue by \$10 million to \$12 million in the next year?’ This opening statement immediately got the audience to sit up and not only listen but actually engage in the presentation. Their close rate almost doubled.”

Have a Big Finish

How a rep opens a presentation is important, but how a presentation ends is equally vital, says Patricia Fripp, a business presentation coach.

“You need to have last words linger, and it’s never a new idea, it’s [reiterating] why you would be better than status quo or the competition,” Fripp told SMM in a telephone interview. “The walkaway line is the No. 1 reason they want to do business with you.” (See story on page 7.)

“A brilliant presentation is worth nothing if you don’t bring it home with a powerful close,” says Aja Frost, an SEO specialist at HubSpot. She offers these [tips for finishing strong](#):

- **Revisit an opening anecdote or idea** – Starting a presentation with a case study or anecdote that the prospect can relate to captures attention immediately; returning to it as a summary tactic adds a compelling element of cohesion to your presentation.
- **End with a challenge** – “Are you going to continue to let your company’s communication issues cripple your effectiveness?” A challenge can keep you top-of-mind after a presentation is over. However, read the room first. There is a fine line between confidence and arrogance. Crossing it can leave a prospect with a negative impression.
- **Inspire** – Understand that change is difficult for companies. A well-chosen quote of reassurance can put things in a new light.
- **Surface objections** – “If you decide not to buy, what would be the reasons?” Addressing objections so directly can be frightening, but admitting they exist and offering resolutions can be powerfully positive.
- **Don't shy away from emotion** – There it is again. If it feels appropriate, a personal story or joke can add memorability and increase trust.

Practice Makes Perfect Pitches

Strong sales presentations don't happen by accident. Like anything done well, practice is essential. Today’s tech stacks include multipurpose sales enablement platforms that organize marketing content, making it easier to customize presentations, feature AI-powered training programs, and foster sales management interactions and peer-to-peer coaching.

FEATURE STORY

Deniz Olcay, senior director of product marketing at Allego, says the customization capability that sales enablement software like the platform they provide is essential to allowing reps to speak not only to each individual prospect's interests, but to the unique interests of several members of a buying team.

"You can't just have one pitch and be done with it," Olcay said in an interview with SMM. "You need variations of your story for each persona. There's a person who holds the purse strings who cares about a certain set of things; a person who is the user of a product; a department head... Different things will resonate for different members of the buying team. Sellers need to manage that complexity and create variations of the story, and that's where technology can help."

Olcay says too many sales presentations are created in a marketing ivory tower and handed to sales teams without sales reps' input. "It's too easy for people who are in a siloed environment to think, 'Hey, this is the best version of the story.' Rarely do I see a partnership with sales. Rarely do I see an agile approach. You're not trying to create a silver bullet in a silo. Presentations should always be evolving.

"In reality, nobody really knows until you go into the field and pitch it to a buyer whether they will get a positive reaction," he adds. "It, by nature, creates a partnership between marketing and sales to create the story. It's not owned by one person. That helps it feel like it's a person presenting and not a robot reading from a script." **SMM**

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Connect Emotionally and Save the Product Features for Your Brochures

Rob Mitchell, CEO of FT Longitude, a marketing services division of the *Financial Times*, offers four ways that B2B companies can use their thought leadership to connect emotionally with their audience.

Remember that your prospects are people, not just decision-makers. Senior executives are not robots. Thought leadership that demonstrates an appreciation of these emotions is much more likely to resonate with them than something that talks in the abstract about business and management trends.

Go beyond the sale to provide inspiration. Focusing on the immediate solution to a business problem is shortsighted. Instead, B2B brands need to demonstrate long-term vision and show buyers that they understand the wider industry and business dynamics. They should show that they can solve not just today's challenges, but tomorrow's as well.

Appeal to their sense of pride — and inspire them. Making a B2B purchase is risky. The people who make buying decisions want to know that there are rewards to balance that risk.

Telling them that your product will generate cost savings, integrate seamlessly with other systems or comply with regulations is hardly inspiring. Instead, focus on how a relationship with your business will boost their careers, generate a sense of personal pride and ultimately transform the business, the entire industry or even society at large.

Focus on emotional priming. Demonstrate that you understand the wider business context and the challenges faced by B2B buyers, and you will lay the groundwork for a meaningful connection.

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Wear a Fancy Hat and Finish Strong

BY PAUL NOLAN

Let the competition make mistakes. Here are ways to leave a lasting impression.

Patricia Fripp chooses her hats carefully and her words even more carefully.

The sales presentation and executive speech coach says a stylish hat has proven to be a reliable conversation starter for her over the years — and starting a conversation is the only way to eventually make a sale.

“People will walk across a room to tell you how much they like your hat. Finding a way to make it easy for people to talk with you is essential,” she said.

A distinctive hat may be a great conversation starter, but Fripp emphasizes that salespeople must have a clear understanding of how conversations with prospective customers should flow to be successful. The strongest salespeople know how to stand out and be memorable. The first step to accomplishing that is to talk about what matters to each prospect.

“When somebody says, ‘Tell us about your company,’ what they’re really saying is, ‘Tell me how my company would be better off by doing business with your company,’” Fripp said.

Having worked with hundreds of companies on sales presentations — and continually honing her own sales pitch — Fripp offered some of these insights on frequent mistakes and tested tactics for more effective sales presentations during a phone interview. Other tips are taken from her [downloadable PDF](#), “11 Mistakes Sales Professionals Make in Their Presentations.”

Start with congratulations – Find a success story for each prospect and help them celebrate it. It could be a new product launch, a new client they’ve landed or the fact that their stock price is up significantly. “It’s not that difficult to find something about them to celebrate. Look at their website, call the

receptionist or call some of their customers. By the time you speak with decision-makers, you’ve undoubtedly talked with other people along the way who can give you [celebration-worthy] information,” she said.

Use prospects’ words to summarize their needs –

Prospects and customers will never disagree with themselves. Take their words and put them into your presentation, as in, “You said one of your biggest challenges is...”

Always bring your own happy customers’ stories with you –

Reps should have a portfolio of success case studies that will resonate with any prospect they encounter. This allows for a twist to the axiom to talk about your clients, not your company or your product. “You’re going to talk about you all the way through, but you’ll do it with stories of successes that match their needs,” Fripp said.

Use the proper structure – Here again, it’s critical to make sure the conversation or presentation is structured around each prospect’s interests, challenges or opportunities. Put as many of their words into the presentation as possible.

Don’t talk too much – Reps need to avoid the laundry list of features and capabilities that makes it into so many marketing materials. Prospects are more interested in their companies than yours. Know how you can help them solve their problems and stick to that.

Omit needless words – This is taken from “The Elements of Style,” William Strunk’s bible of effective writing. Fripp didn’t say this verbatim, but she strongly believes it, whether it’s sales conversations or visual presentations. “PowerPoint is a visual aid, not a scripting aid,” she said. If you feel the need to have a

more descriptive PowerPoint as a leave-behind for those who weren't at a presentation, develop two versions of it, Fripp advised.

Wrong levels of abstraction – For first contacts with executives, reps should describe what your company can do for them from a high level of abstraction. They should be ready to shift to more detailed and technical discussions if questions lead them there. Some decision-makers will require plenty of data. To maximize each meeting, speak the same language or bring an associate who can.

Be specific – Specificity builds credibility and helps position you above the competition. If reps are armed with specific success story data, instead of them telling a prospect they will likely grow their business with your company's help, they can say, "There are no guarantees, however, our last three clients increased sales an average of 32% in seven months."

Make sure last words linger – Identifying the most practical next step is necessary before winding up a sales conversation, but your last words also give you a great opportunity to reinforce what makes you the best choice. "The walkaway line is the No. 1 reason they want to do business with you."



Patricia Fripp says
a distinctive hat
is a good conversation
starter, but it's just
that – a starter.

It may be how your company has been around for 100 years and will be around for more than 100 more. If your company is smaller than competitors, you can reassure prospects that you're big enough to handle all their needs, but small enough that the prospect will always be treated as a VIP. **SMM**

Patricia Fripp is an executive speech coach, author, and sales presentation and online learning expert. She has helped hundreds of companies drive more business by polishing their sales conversations and presentations, and helped leaders inspire action and build commitment through their words. You can learn more about her and download free resources at fripp.com.

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