

COLUMNS

11 ways to gain the trust of prospects and customers

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Did you know that more than 90 percent of buyers admit that they only buy from vendors that they trust? But it can be hard to gain the trust of your prospects and customers.

Building trust is a journey that starts before a sales rep speaks with a prospect. Perhaps they know your brand. Or the word of mouth from friends and colleagues drives them to visit your Web site.

As a sales manager, one of your jobs is to impress upon reps the importance of building trust. They have to earn it with every call, email and action. It is their job to turn a good first impression into a strong sense of trust.

When discussing trust with your reps, share your firsthand experiences. Be their role model and lead by example. To help you guide your reps, we have compiled a list of 11 trust-building techniques you can share or reinforce.

1. Smile

Set the tone for a call with your "hello." Even before dialing, smile. It is amazing how the slightest grin can lift your spirits and put you in a positive frame of mind. And believe me, the person can hear your smile on the other end of the phone.

2. Use names

Refer to prospects by name at the beginning of the call and a few times during your conversations.

3. Do not pitch or pander

No one appreciates a heavy-handed sales pitch or an effort to pander. Trust is built through rapport, engagement and two-way conversations.

Talk with prospects, not at them. Above all, do not read from a script. Base your message on proven talking points. Decide how best to work essential points into a discussion.

4. Be honest

We have all heard that you sometimes have to fake it to make it. But your integrity is on the line. When you are not genuine, people know, and your relationship will never get off the ground.

Do not skirt around the truth or exaggerate. When asked, talk about the strengths and weaknesses of your products or services. And if you do not know the answer to a question, admit it. Tell the buyer that you will get back to them with the answer. That is another opportunity to interact.

5. Ask questions and listen

On the road to trust, you need to engage. And engagement is a two-way street. Ask insightful questions and **pay attention to the answers**. Do not just wait for a person to draw a breath so you can make your next point.

And if you want to get buyers to listen to you, share a story. You will not only grab their attention, but they are also more likely to remember what you said.

6. Target your message

Avoid generalities. Show that you care enough to do your homework by targeting your message to a prospect's industry, company and pain points. **Research shows** that 70 percent of buying decisions are made in response to a specific problem or need. So address those issues head-on.

7. Focus on specific needs

Trust comes with the value you provide. Be consultative in your style and insightful with your facts. Address their particular pain points and issues, and back up your statements with case studies and testimonials.

Buyers know you are trying to make a sale they accept that that is your job. But if you can offer real insight that both informs and helps them make an educated buying decision, you will gain respect and trust.

According to one **B2B study**, 95 percent of buyers admit that they select vendors that deliver useful content.

8. Match a prospect's speaking style

As a telesales professional, you need an ear for the tone, cadence and pitch of your customer or prospect.

Do not be a motor mouth if the person you are talking with is slow and deliberate with his or her words. And do not dominate the conversation. You will gain trust by putting the other speaker at ease.

9. Be professional

By all means, be funny. Just do not forfeit your professionalism. Whether you are calling, presenting on a webinar, sharing on social media or sending an email, be respectful. Remember to include a call to action. Ask for the sale, if appropriate.

10. Keep your promises

Follow through on your promises to get back to someone with additional information. Do so when you promised, so nothing falls through the cracks. Start the process the minute you hang up and keep notes in your CRM.

Set expectations, then deliver more.

11. Ask for referrals

Build a circle of trust with your customers. Once you gain their confidence, ask for referrals. According to **Salesforce**, 93 percent of customers are more likely to recommend a company they trust.

Mentioning a familiar name makes starting a new sales process easier. From there, you can reinforce the connection and begin building trust using all the techniques above.

TRUST STARTS with you. You need to earn it from your customers and prospects and reinforce in your reps the many ways they can do the same.

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