

The Three Biggest Mistakes in Sales Presentations

[By Dave Kahle](#)

The sales presentation is a necessary part of every sales process, of every sales call, and of every sales system. A sales presentation is what we call that portion of the sales process in which you communicate your product or service to the customer. The job of the sales person revolves around the point in time when he offers the customer something to buy. Without a presentation, there can be no sale.

The presentation can take a variety of forms. If you demonstrate a product, for example, that is a sales presentation. If you use a hard-copy brochure or a CD Rom presentation on your lap-top, that is a sales presentation. If you deliver and detail a sample, that is a sales presentation. If you respond to the customer's request, and provide a price, deliver a proposal, or submit a bid, each of these is a sales presentation. You can make a presentation in person, over the internet, via email, or over the phone.

Without the sales presentation, there can be no sale. It is, then, the foundational step in the sales process. Everything that happens before is in preparation for the presentation, and everything that happens afterward is a result of the presentation.

You would think, then, that every sales person is extremely well-trained in the science of making an effective sales presentation.

Alas, that is not the case. Left to learn on their own, many sales people make the same mistakes over and over again. Here are the three most commonly made sales presentation mistakes.

1. Lack of preparation.

In my very first sales position, I had to endure six weeks of sales training. In those six weeks, the entire training class had to memorize two four-page sales presentations, and give them to the training class. We were videoed and

critiqued, over and over, for the six weeks. As you can imagine, at the end of that time we were thoroughly prepared to give that sales presentation.

Now that may have been a bit of an overkill, but the point remains: Preparation is the first step towards an effective sales presentation.

That doesn't necessarily mean that you must memorize the presentation. But it does mean that you organize it, that you secure and check your collateral (the samples, brochures, price quotes, etc that form the basis of what you are selling), and that you practice the presentation several times until you are comfortable with it and confident in your ability to deliver it.

Unfortunately, preparation is a discipline that seems to be fading from the routines of many sales people. The world is full of sales people who either have little respect for their customer's time, no particular interest in doing their jobs well, or an over-inflated view of their own ad-libbing abilities. Any of these produces the sense that they don't need to prepare, that on the spur of the moment, they will come up with the most persuasive things to say, in the most effective manner.

That's too bad. Preparation is the first step toward a better sales presentation, and lack of preparation is endemic in the world of sales.

2. Information purging.

This occurs when a sales person thinks his/her job is to relate everything he/she knows about the product, service or proposal.

I was deeply into a training program wherein we work with six sales people every day for a week. Sales people role-played various situations, we videoed them, critiqued them, and had them role play again, only better.

We were methodically working through the sales process, and it was time to make the sales presentation. The class was taught to organize the presentation on the basis of what they learned about the customer in the previous "find out what they want" role play.

One particular sales person never got that message. He thought a sales presentation was like an oral exam in school. It was his opportunity to spill everything he knew about the product. What should have been a 20 minute presentation dragged on and on for 45 minutes. Even though it was a role play in front of the class, even though it was being video recorded, the person playing the customer began to fall asleep. The hapless sales person continued on, oblivious to the customer's lack of interest, purging himself of every bit and morsel of related information. I had to finally step in and put an end to the tedium.

While that may have been a dramatic example of this mistake, it occurs in smaller ways thousands of times a day. It occurs when sales people feel the need to tell the customer everything they know about the product or service they are presenting, whether the customer cares or is interested in that feature or not.

The problem is greater than just "too much information." Sales people who do this disrespect the customer, as they don't take the customer's interests and requirements into account in the presentation. Additionally, it's not unusual for an undisciplined sales person to blunder over some minor feature which raises concerns in the customer's eyes.

As a result, customers are turned off and tuned out, and sales people leave shaking their heads, unable to fathom why the customer didn't buy all the incredible features of his sales presentation.

3. Failure to include the customer in the presentation.

This occurs when the sales person thinks that the presentation is all about his product, service or proposal. The truth is that effective sales presentations are always about two things: the offer, and how it can impact the customer.

When sales people simply talk about their offer, and ignore the second half of the equation, they make one of the most common mistakes. Customers are far more interested in how the thing being presented impacts them, than they are in the details of the offer.

The sales person may be impressed with all the neat details and features, but that reflects his/her values, not necessarily those of the customer.

The best sales presentations describe the salient features of the offer, and then relate them to how they impact the customer. Remember “features and benefits”?

We train sales people to start a presentation with a description of the customer’s situation and needs, move onto features and advantages, translate them into benefits, and end with the customer’s next step. Notice that half the presentation (at least) is about the customer. Notice also that the sales presentation begins and ends with the customer.

This third most common mistake occurs when sales people emphasize the features, and forget the benefits. The customer walks away with the impression that the sales person was more interested in peddling his product than he was helping the customer find a solution.

If you are guilty of any of these mistakes, or, as a manager, if your sales force is guilty of them, then their sales presentations are not as effective as they could be. You are leaving money on the table. Fix these mistakes, and watch your sales rise.

Learn to make better sales presentations with a selection of classes in our [Sales Resource Center™](http://www.thesalesresourcecenter.com), (<http://www.thesalesresourcecenter.com>) where we deliver over 435 training units over the internet, 24/7, for one low monthly fee.