

11 Rules for Selling to a Skeptic

1. Know your product/service

Know it inside and out, backwards and forwards. You should know its strengths, weaknesses, and any proprietary features. Also understand the factors that influence its supply and demand. All of these will strengthen your presentation and help the skeptic make a more informed purchasing decision. There should be nothing that anyone can tell you about what you solicit. You will definitely be asked questions, so be prepared to demonstrate all aspects of your product/service in response.

2. Know your prospect

Along with knowing your product comes knowing your prospect. Strive to know all you can about your target demographic and potential clients. Make sure you deal with the decision maker. You should know their purchasing habits, what motivation determines their choice, and how long a buying decision takes. You must understand how your product fits into their overall purchasing strategy. When you know the buying habits of your prospect, you can use it to develop a longer-term sales plan—that means repeat business. Put yourself in the most favorable position to get a "yes" by focusing on what most concerns your prospect.

3. Believe in your own words

You will never be effective selling something you do not believe in, particularly to someone who is already skeptical. Your lack of enthusiasm will be an obvious as you attempt to convince your potential buyer. When you emanate passion and confidence, you break down the wall of doubt the cynic has built. To not be a pillar of strength during your presentation is a sure-fire ticket to an abrupt "no." If you are lucky enough to sell a product you do not believe in, you still lose because you risk killing referral business and losing the trust of your customer.

4. Be transparent

Too often, we give strong pitches with lots of hype and little information. We will say, "If you want these benefits, buy my product." This is done with the hope that a prospect's curiosity about your bold claims will be enough to convince them to purchase. The idea that if you divulge too much information, you could dissuade your prospect is a far too common falsehood. Be prepared to give as much information as needed to convince the potential buyer to make a purchase. Transparency builds trust. Things people do not understand will always be greeted with "no." The more information available when making a purchasing decision, the more likely they are to say "yes." Another benefit of being transparent is the more resources you divulge free of charge, the more likely you are to generate interest in your product/service.

5. Gain trust by associating yourself with things they respect

By offering endorsements and testimonials, especially from well-known sources that your target market respects, you strike the chord of "trust." Many a skeptic has purchased based on the recommendations of individuals they respect. Secure associations along these lines and look to align yourself with trusted agencies through strategic partnerships. Major endorsements mean less resistance and lots of sales.

6. Offer a free trial, incentive, bargain, or guarantee

The structure of your offer can play a key role in building trust and enticing your prospect to buy. There are many variations of each, but incentives and guarantees are great ways to gain your potential buyer's confidence. Guarantees and free trails allow the skeptic to try the product/service before determining if your offer is a good fit. Incentives and discounts are also valuable tactics as they make the cynic feel they are getting a value. People always love the feeling of getting something for free and buying when it is a low/no-risk transaction. By guaranteeing the quality of your product/service, you disarm the skeptic and encourage them to buy. You also communicate an important message that you are confident in what you sell.

7. Compare and differentiate yourself from your competitors

Know the nature of your business. Is it commodity based, where the low price bidder wins? Is the strength of your brand a factor? Is there something unique about your offer? You must understand your competitors and their advantages and disadvantages. Once you have both the knowledge of your competitors and an understanding of the skeptic's needs, you can choose the most effective marketing angle. We offer such phrases as:

"The lowest cost"...you play to the desire for value

"The official"...you validate for authenticity

"The best"...you show superiority

"The only"...you offer exclusivity

If possible, demonstrate the differences that make your product/service unique or superior.

8. Sell the relationship, not the product

Contrary to popular belief, the best salespeople not only close deals, they foster relationships. Relationships are more valuable to both you and the prospect than a one-time transaction. For the salesperson, relationships bring repeat business and the ability to cross-market your offerings; increased referrals because you gain access to the prospect's network base, and the ability to charge a premium because of the higher perceived value of your relationship. For the skeptic, relationships help build trust. These bonds let them know they will not be abandoned after the transaction is finished. Ultimately, they are buying a relationship with you and your firm, not the product/service, so approach selling that way.

9. Focus on benefits offered and value delivered

Self-interest is the skeptic's primary concern, so focus on how your product/service solves their problem, fulfills their need, or satisfies their desire. If your prospect is solely bottom-line focused, your presentation should be centered on how your product or service will make or save them money. If your product satisfies a desire, focus on how it fills an emotional void. Emotional selling differs from bottom-line selling because it focuses on feelings rather than metrics. Remember to focus on the benefits that concern your potential buyer; anything else will make a skeptic lose interest and you lose the sale.

10. Isolate their objection

In life and business, two of the greatest challenges are making intelligent decisions and properly following through on them. One of your fundamental goals as a salesperson is to help people make informed decisions. To do so, ask two types of questions: those to better understand your potential buyer and his/her needs, and questions designed to lead your prospect to buy. A series of well-placed questions will allow you to isolate any objections. You should brainstorm every possible reason a skeptic will not buy from you and comprise an effective solution or rebuttal for each. Any other question should be crafted in a way that allows for only one reasonable answer, and that answer should compel your prospect to agree with you.

11. Don't seem desperate!

Your emotional state will be apparent to a skeptic. Never appear as though you "need" a sale. Everyone avoids a hard-pressed individual. Often we are conditioned to give to and buy from those who do not need our money. It is the same principle that makes us more likely give a rich man fifty-cents to make phone call because he has no change, than to a homeless man in need who makes the same request. Therefore, it is imperative that you operate from a mindset of abundance. Understand there is always a bigger sale out there, so you need not be pressed for this one. Your confidence will put the cynic at ease and make them more likely to buy from you.

Once internalized, these 11 points will mesh into an effective sales strategy. You will begin to think of them not as individual points to be mastered, but one comprehensive selling technique. They are designed to compliment each other and give you a thorough footing for selling to those who are naturally doubtful about you and your service. Master them and win!

About the Author

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