

The make or break skills

Overview - Effective sales proposals and persuasive sales presentations



Got it! - Lost it! - Damn it!

You know the feeling. The deal was in the bag. It was forecast with a probability better than 0.9. It meant your team had exceeded its quarterly target. And then the account manager comes into your office with a hangdog expression and drops the bombshell: the order has gone to a competitor.

If this is happening more often than you'd like, you may be feeling a bit confused.

Like most sophisticated organisations you've probably made a major investment in training in recent years to give your salespeople skills like consultative needs development and selling to their key differentiators.

And you're quite right – these are the *most important* skills in effective selling. But they're not the only skills.

You may have overlooked two skill sets that can make or break the sale; especially in very high-value deals, right at the end of the sales cycle. Lack of these skills means that *your salespeople stop selling effectively when they have to make presentations and proposals*.

In the complex selling process proposals and presentations give you the best opportunities to relate the benefits of your product to the perceived needs of the entire decision making group. Yet, in all honesty, how many of your salespeople's proposals and presentations:

- Open with a detailed but unpersuasive pitch about your organisation's history, size etc? (So what?)
- Focus on the features of your product or service rather than the specific needs of individual decision-makers?

- Fail to make a comprehensive business case and so are unpersuasive to decision-influencers who have not been closely involved in the sale?
- Meet with low or no reaction because they are unstructured, boring or difficult to follow?
- Offer detailed price breakdowns which invite analysis, comparison and negotiation?
- Fail to differentiate your offering effectively from those of your competitors?

It's ironic, but the emphasis on consultative selling may mean that your proposal and presentation skills are now the weakest link in your sales chain. The key question is, what can you do to improve them?

Win with Huthwaite

For almost thirty years Huthwaite has been researching the key success factors on the process of making complex, high value sales.

Thousands of live sales interviews have been subjected to Behaviour Analysis, a research technique for observing and quantifying interactions between sellers and buyers.

This research revealed a set of interactive skills, based largely on questioning, which the most effective salespeople use to help the buyer work through the psychological stages of making a major purchase, while influencing the decision in favour of the seller, of course.

Huthwaite researchers also conducted hundreds of interviews with successful high value sellers and buying teams. Using a variety of techniques ranging from focus group discussion to structured questionnaires, they explored key issues such as:

- methods used by buying teams to evaluate competing offerings
- unspoken concerns which cause buyers to reject apparently attractive offers - and the excuses they give to salespeople
- qualities that make a proposal readable, accessible and persuasive to buyers
- reactions of the buying audience to differing presentation skills, styles, structure and content.

From this huge research base Huthwaite has created skill development programmes that help salespeople apply the concepts of buyer psychology to the presentation of persuasive proposals. Presentations and Proposals can be addressed either as separate topics or through an integrated programme that capitalises on the synergy between the two skill sets.

Huthwaite training in Effective Sales Proposals and Persuasive Sales Presentations will strengthen your late cycle selling efforts and help to eliminate nasty shocks. We like an adult-to-adult relationship with our clients, so we won't claim that you'll win every deal; but we'll help you win the ones you should win – and if you lose, at least you'll probably understand why.

The next few pages contain overviews of the proposal writing and presentation programmes, together with a graphic illustrating the synergy between them. These are followed by a brief insight into one of the least understood but most potent weapons in the seller's armoury – the Handling of Customer Concerns.

Overview - Effective sales proposals

Objectives

By the end of the programme each participant will:

- have analysed one of their own proposals, brought with them to the programme, and considered its strengths and weaknesses as a persuasive document
- be able to describe the process of persuasion and the phases of buyer psychology in complex sales
- have analysed the customer's decision criteria and the implications for their own competitive position
- have a model for the sequencing of content in a proposal to achieve optimum persuasiveness
- have analysed and considered how to handle customer concerns that could block the sale
- have guidelines for the image and style of their proposals and have created a format appropriate to both their corporate identity and their market place
- have guidelines for writing style and structure that will make their proposals readable and user-friendly.

Target audience

Salespeople, managers, technical specialists and any staff who contribute to the preparation of proposal or tender documents. The programme is especially valuable if 'bid teams' attend together, as this ensures that the technical content of the proposal is persuasively integrated with the customer's needs uncovered by the account managers or sales executives.

Programme content

Persuasive content

- Describing the customer's present situation.
- Customer problems and their implications.
- Needs, as stated by the customer.
- Customer's criteria for the ideal supplier.
- Presenting yourself as the ideal supplier.
- Your solutions to meet the customer's needs.
- Payoffs and value of your solutions.
- Handling customer concerns about risk, costs and implementation hassles.

Image and style

- Physical presentation: how the document looks.
- Customising the proposal; personalised copies for each decision-maker.
- Titling and text style.
- Using graphics and illustrations.
- Value of customers quotes and summaries.

Readability

- Preparing an executive summary.
- Contents and cross-referencing.
- Sections and headings.
- Appendices, presentation of price and technical data.
- Writing style and the fog index.

Training design and methodology

This programme is structured as a workshop rather than as a training course. During the programme participants can either re-write an old proposal (to serve as a template for future proposals) or create the draft of a proposal for a current 'live case' sale.

The models and guidelines are introduced in small, logical steps. Using the Huthwaite principle that learning is doing, exercises are introduced at key points during the workshop to help the delegates apply the concept to their own products and customers: what problems do their customers have? What needs do they really express? What concerns do they have about the risks of change? What is the Fog Index of my normal writing style?

This methodology ensures that delegates put theory into practice, and take ownership of the proposal template they have created.

Materials

As already described, there are comprehensive exercises throughout the programme. Delegates also receive a library of user-friendly reference material giving detailed explanations of the key concepts.

Duration

Normally two days. Other timing designs are possible to suit individual client requirements. Because there is some shared training content, this programme can also be combined with Huthwaite's Persuasive Sales Presentations programme to create a synergistic three-day event.

Faculty and group size

The workshop is facilitated by a senior Huthwaite consultant experienced, whenever possible, in the client's industry sector. To ensure that each participant receives individual attention and feedback, group size is limited to a maximum of twelve.

Synergy savings!

The persuasive content of effective sales proposals and presentations is virtually identical. If you and your sales team would benefit from acquiring both skill sets we can deliver a tailor-made in-company programme which will save you both time off-the-job and training fees.

Effective sales proposals

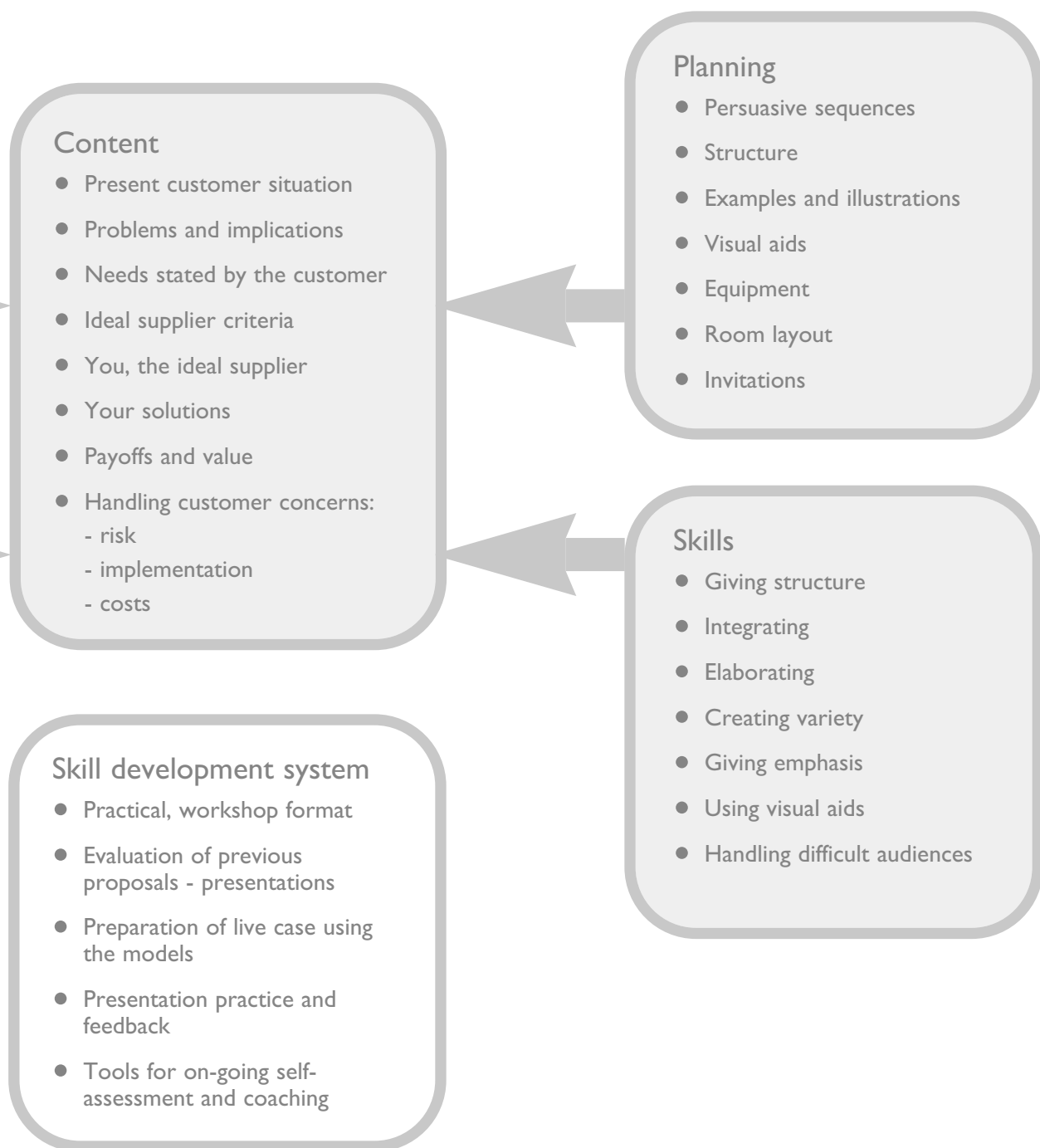
Image and style

- Customising/personalising
- Title
- Text style
- Graphics
- Illustrations
- Summaries
- Customer quotes

Readability

- Executive summary
- Contents
- Sections and headings
- Appendices
- Writing style
- Fog index

Persuasive sales presentations



Overview – Persuasive sales presentations

Objectives

By the end of the programme each participant will:

- have made an initial, untutored presentation and analysed the strengths and weaknesses of their current presentation style
- understand and have practised using the guidelines for planning and preparing for a presentation
- have understood and practised using a research-based model for the selection and sequencing of the persuasive content of their presentation
- be able to select and prepare appropriate graphics, visual aids, examples and illustrations to support their presentations
- understand and be able to describe the model of behavioural skills used by effective presenters
- have planned, prepared and made presentations using the guidelines and skill models taught on the programme
- have received constructive feedback based on the trainer's behaviour analysis of their performance, so that they can identify areas for continuing post-course skill improvement.

Target audience

All those who participate in making formal sales presentations, usually to the customer's decision making team, as part of the selling process. Particularly if technical specialists are required to make part of the sales presentation, continuity of style and the persuasive message will be improved if the whole bid team attends the programme together.

Programme content

Presentation problems

- An initial presentation and exercise to allow each participant to surface weaknesses or concerns about their current presentation style.

Skills used by effective presenters (S.I.E.V.E.)

- *Structuring* in advance, indicating transition, summarizing, linking.
- *Integrating* the persuasive content with the customer's perceptions and needs.
- *Elaborating*, with illustrations, analogies, proof statements and benefits.
- *Variety*: created by jokes and asides, rhetorical questions, voice modulation, pauses.
- *Emphasis*: by repetition, importance stating, pauses, non-verbal communication.

Content of persuasive presentations

- Describing the customer's present situation, problems and their implications.
- Presenting yourself as the ideal supplier.
- Needs, as stated by the customer.
- Customer's criteria for the ideal supplier and how you can meet them.
- Customer problems and their implications.
- Your solutions to meet the customer's needs.
- Payoffs and value of your solutions.
- Handling customer concerns about risk, cost, implementation hassles.

Presentation styles

- Common mistakes.
- Achieving balance and sending the right messages.
- Techniques for handling difficult audiences.

Planning and preparing the presentation

- Selecting the persuasive content.
- Planning sequence and structure.
- Preparing examples: illustrations, visual aids and equipment.
- Options for room layout: pros and cons.

Training design and methodology

The training design is based on the principle that trainees learn best by *doing and reviewing*. Delegates are asked to bring two prepared presentations to the programme. A first presentation is made at the beginning of the programme to establish existing strengths and weakness. Guidelines for planning, preparation, persuasive content and the researched Success Model of skills used by effective presenters are then introduced in logical steps.

Delegates apply the principles in making two more presentations, each of which is reviewed in terms of structure, content, style and the trainers Behaviour Analysis of the skills used.

This repetitive cycle of input–practice–feedback helps trainees to match their behaviour ever closer to the Success Model as the course progresses and equips them with an awareness of their own behaviour so that skill improvement can continue post-course.

Materials

During the programme trainees receive a set of documentation to assist them in planning the structure and content of effective presentations.

They also take away a comprehensive set of user-friendly reference material giving detailed explanation of key concepts.

Video recording, to give trainees a permanent record of their presentations, may be used, at an additional cost, if the client wishes.

Duration

Normally two days. Other timing designs are possible to suit individual client requirements. This programme can also be combined with Huthwaite's Effective Sales Proposals programme to create a synergistic three day event.

Faculty and group size

This programme is delivered by a senior Huthwaite consultant experienced, whenever possible, in the clients industry sector. To ensure that each participant receives sufficient individual attention, practice opportunity and feedback, group size is limited to eight.

Customer concerns – the secret weapon

Most sellers today are familiar with the concept of needs: that customers buy products or services because they have recognised a need for what the product or service will do for them – the benefits and payoffs they will enjoy.

So these sellers are frequently confused and disappointed when they have offered an apparently ideal solution to the customer's need, only to find that the deal has gone to a competitor, or, even more confusing, that the purchase decision is delayed indefinitely as the customer seems to have decided to live with the status quo.

What the sellers fail to understand is that very often the customer's decision either to buy from a competitor or to buy nothing at all is motivated not by needs, but by a totally different phenomenon, Concerns.

Concerns usually arise late in the sales cycle as the customer becomes increasingly aware of the consequences of making the wrong purchasing decision. Concerns can be grouped under three main headings:

- **Risks** – Will the system or product perform as promised? Is the supplier reliable? Is post-sale support going to be adequate? What are the personal consequences of failure?
- **Implementation** – How much disruption will be caused? How will our staff react to new technologies and systems? Does the supplier understand all the potential difficulties?

- **Costs** – Can the purchase be cost justified? Will the actual costs be as the supplier has proposed? Will the promised savings really be achieved?

Concerns may be present in any high-value sale, but you are especially likely to encounter them when you are selling new, complex technology and competing against larger or better-known suppliers.

Reticence – and the polite excuse

A major problem for sellers is that customers very often don't express their concerns, for obvious reasons: it's easy to say, "*Flawless installation is crucial to us,*" (a Need); but much more difficult, for most people, to say directly to a salesperson, "*We've heard rumours that a lot of your implementations are chaotic,*" (a Concern).

What usually happens is that, after the sale has been lost, the seller is given a face-saving excuse – and it's almost invariably price: "*You were just a bit too expensive,*" is acceptable to both parties. If you've ever worried you were losing too many deals on price, you're probably right, but not in the way you might think. One of our research studies showed that, when customers give price as the reason for not buying, in more than 60% of cases their real reason is not price at all but some other Concern they were not prepared to share with the seller.

Resolving concerns for competitive advantage

Presentations and proposals give you the ideal opportunity to handle the diverse Concerns of the entire decision making group.

Truly effective sellers can recognise behaviour by the buying team, which indicates that Concerns may be present (we'll tell you what to watch for). Once alerted, they probe gently but persistently to uncover and understand the Concern and the kind of reassurance the buyer needs. Then, in their proposal and presentations they resolve the Concerns by:

- addressing directly those Concerns which have been raised with proof statements, warranties and appropriate actions
- being realistic about potential difficulties and involving the customer in plans to minimise or eliminate them
- covering other possible Concerns indirectly, by giving sufficient detail about the proposed solution to show that any Concerns are unfounded.

Resolving Concerns in this way not only makes the seller's own proposal more acceptable to the customer, but also raises barriers for competitors. Competitors who fail to address the Concerns will lose the deal; and they will probably never know why.

That's why we call Concerns the secret weapon.

A brief proposal

- You undoubtedly have some, possibly many, salespeople who are experiencing the performance problems and frustrations outlined at the beginning of this brochure.
- Because of lost orders you may also be suffering from internal team stress, low morale, missed targets and damage to your own career prospects.
- Assuming their early-cycle sales skills are adequate, you need to improve the effectiveness of your people's proposals and presentations in order to increase sales productivity.
- Huthwaite has the Skill Models and skill development programmes which could give the desired improvements in effectiveness.
- There will be additional payoffs for you in terms of forecasting accuracy, staff retention, job satisfaction and marginal profitability.
- In case previous bad experiences have given you concerns about the effectiveness of skills training, we would welcome the opportunity to explain and demonstrate how Huthwaite programmes and consultancy can achieve measurable skill transfer and performance improvement.
- May we propose that you contact us to arrange an exploratory meeting with a Huthwaite consultant?

Your next step...

I need further information

Please have a Huthwaite consultant contact me.

Please send me more information about Huthwaite International and the following skill sets:

- Developing major accounts
- Key account management
- Presentations & proposals
- Sales awareness for marketing
- Winning business from corporate entertaining
- Coaching skills
- Negotiation
- Sales management skills
- Selling skills

How to contact us



Call Huthwaite International on +44 (0)1709 710081



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