

The Impact of Follow Up

It never ceases to amaze me how few sales people make the time to follow-up after they have made initial contact with a prospect or customer. In the last few months, I can think of at least eight different situations in my own life (business & personal) when a salesperson did not bother taking this initiative. These included a landscaper who designed plans for our property, two different people who spoke to me about creating a promotional piece of literature for my business, a sales rep for a pool company, and a men's fashion salesman who was asked to send information (I was very interested in his products). In each of these situations I was very interested in the product or service offered by the vendor.

This got me wondering...why don't people follow-up? I think there are several reasons.

They don't want to appear pushy. It may be true that following up too frequently will come across as being pushy. However, very few salespeople ever come close to crossing this line. In fact, one the few times, I left a salesperson was pushy was more because of his tone, rather than fact he actually followed up. As a sales professional, I believe it is our responsibility to keep following up with our prospects until we know for certain if they want to do business with us. However, I also strongly believe that we can cross that line by making too many calls in a short period of time. So where's the happen balance? It depends on your business. A weekly call is more than enough to keep in touch providing you make sure your call is short and to the point. Don't waste your prospect's time by droning on and on. Also, if possible, provide some additional value during your follow-up call. This may give your prospect a reason to choose you instead of a competitor.

They forget. It's easy to forget considering how busy we are. We may have every intention of calling our prospect but we get caught up in our business. Unexpected problems crop up, we find ourselves spending more time in meetings ad stuck in traffic, and because we didn't schedule the follow-up, it doesn't get done. This is a common dilemma but one that can be avoided by considering the follow-up like a scheduled appointment.

They make false assumptions. I once submitted a proposal to a company and told them I would follow-up on a certain day and time. Unfortunately, I was extremely sick that particular day and it was several days before I recuperated. I then wrestled with whether or not I should call him. I was concerned he would question why I didn't call as scheduled. In the end, a simple apology was enough to rectify the situation and move the sales process forward.

When someone doesn't immediately return our phone call or email message, we usually assume the worst – even if this assumption is not verified. I have learned from experience that a lack of response can often be attributed to the fact that the other person is just too busy to respond or does not have an answer for you.

They think that the customer or prospect will contact them. I think this is one of the most common myths sales people fall prey to. They think that if they do a good job the customer will automatically call us back – we don't need to follow-up. Unfortunately, we cannot rely on this if we want to achieve our sales goals. People get busy, they forget or procrastinate and the more time that slips by, the less important your product or service may be to that prospective customer.

They have never been taught. Many people have never received formal sales training and have not learned why they should follow-up and how to make this happen. This is relatively easy to remedy. Start by asking or telling your prospect that you will follow-up on a specific day or time. Tell them how you will follow-up (telephone, email, face-to-face) and record this in your

day planner or time management system. I use Outlook and now include a reminder so I don't forget to follow-up.

Follow-up should also be completed after the sale is completed. A quick telephone call after your product or service has been delivered confirms their decision to buy from you. I make an effort to send every client a handwritten thank-you card once the sale has been confirmed and again when the services they requested have been delivered.

Here's the bottom line. You can easily differentiate yourself from your competition by making the effort to follow-up with your prospects and customers. Don't take it for granted that they will call you. Be proactive and contact them.

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