



Selling to ‘The Staller’

Identify the problem without labeling your customer

by Phil Sasso

You’ve just given one of the most persuasive demos of your career. You’ve brilliantly covered every key feature and benefit of a new piece of equipment. Your customer is with you every step of the way. He has smart questions and is giving every buying signal.

So you begin to close the deal and write up the order.

Suddenly, your customer turns to you and stammers, “Let me think about it...” His eyes begin to glow red. He sprouts horns. He spits battery acid.

You’ve just encountered a mobile jobber’s worst nightmare, “The Staller,” an ugly green monster that destroys hope and shreds order forms.

Contrary to what some sales trainers might say, your customer hasn’t become some hideous comic book villain. He is just uncertain, facing the normal anxiety

that goes with some purchases — especially big-ticket purchases. He’s not an adversary that needs to be combated. He simply needs convincing.

Instinct might tell you if a customer is on the line you need to shove him off. In fact, some sales trainers might give you the impression that your job is to apply as much pressure as possible to close a deal immediately or risk losing the sale — and having The Staller destroy your bottomline. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I admit there are some customers that seem more like fiends than friends. But for the most part, your customers respect you because you respect them. Pushing them into a decision before they’re ready could affect your long-term sales with that customer and destroy the trust you’ve worked so hard to build. They may end up never asking for a demo again because you might try to strong arm them into something they don’t want or need.

The problem with seeing The Staller as a villain, besides being a little melodramatic, is that kind of thinking unconsciously pits you against your customer and creates tension.

Many sales trainers don’t understand what makes being a mobile jobber different from most other selling situations. As a jobber, you visit the customer every week or two, so if he puts off buying something until he’s ready next week, you’ll be there when he’s ready. You just need to be persistent in your follow-up, and be sure to keep notes.

Don’t misunderstand me. I’m not saying you shouldn’t encourage the The Staller to buy today if possible. I’m just saying undue pressure isn’t very encouraging. He needs your help to feel confident about the decision. Or maybe he really does need a few days to think about it.

Leaving the customer unsold could leave the door open to another mobile jobber. But pushing too hard could lose the sale, too. You need to know the difference between a customer that’s indecisive vs. a customer that’s undecided.

An indecisive customer is ready to buy — but he’s uncertain about the best decision. He’s like that obnoxious guy always in front of me at the fast food place when I’m in a hurry. He just stares at the menu while the cashier waits to take his order. You know he

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came in to buy something. (Not many people window shop at a burger joint.) He might be overwhelmed by the choices, the calories or the amount of money in his wallet. But he's not likely to leave hungry.

If you face an indecisive customer, the best thing to do is to assure them they're making the right decision (assuming they are making the right decision). If they seem overwhelmed by choices, point out the most popular package you sell. People feel secure knowing most others have made the same choice. If they are worried about reliability, tell them about the warranty. Figure out their fear and address it.

If you have the tool in stock, remind them they could start using it today. If you don't, let them know the sooner they order it, the sooner they can start using it. Creating a sense of urgency can sometimes help an indecisive customer take the leap.

An undecided customer, on the other hand, doesn't know if he wants anything. He's a lot like me staring into the refrigerator at 10 p.m. deciding whether I'm hungry or tired. I probably don't really need to eat. If Beth challenged me, I would probably choose to avoid the snack. But, it's a delicate balance.

I most likely will eat something from that refrigerator — when I'm ready. Maybe it's just not now.

If you sense you're dealing with an undecided customer, your best route is often to arm them with information and help them do their homework. Give them the literature and the web site. Even tell them your cellphone number so they can call you with any questions, or to place the order the minute they decide to buy.

In either case, if you leave the customer unsold, be sure you make a note to follow-up. Next time you see them, ask if they've made a decision. Let them know if you've sold more of the same tool since you were there last. Even offer the person's name and shop. It will assure them that they are making the right decision.

Most importantly, don't let The Staller strike fear into you. 

Phil Sasso is president of Sasso Marketing Inc., an aftermarket advertising & public relations firm. Phil is also a speaker and consultant. Sign up for his weekly marketing tips on his blog, www.philsasso.com/blog.



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