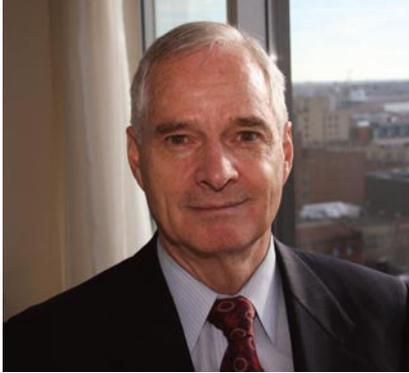


SELLING TO THE RESELLER CHANNEL

LISTEN. WATCH. PROBE.

by MORGAN SMYTH



If you are a sales rep for a computer products or service company and your territory is the VAR Channel, I think you have the easiest, and potentially the most lucrative, sales position in the company's entire sales group. Why? Because, unlike all

of the other sales reps, your customers truly want to buy your wares.

They not only want to buy them; they want to buy as much of them as they possibly can. The bigger and more expensive, the better. And guess what? Next year they want to buy even more! Could it get any sweeter than this?

Yes it can!

VARs have actually structured their entire organizations around buying your products (and others'). Their purchasing people, their accounting people and, most importantly, their sales people are all trained, compensated and motivated to buy your products. They have also invested significant time and money into getting their technical staff completely trained and certified in your products. As further proof of their total commitment, even their yearly objectives are predicated on the number of products they plan to buy from you.

Why would they do this? Simple – because they resell them – hopefully at a profit.

Knowing this clearly it begs the question: “So what's stopping them from buying your products?” Good question. Have you ever asked?

In my 20 plus years as a reseller, I can't recall ever once hearing one of these manufacturers' sales reps ask me this question. I can recall stating the above facts to many of them on several occasions. But all I ever got back was that Homer Simpson look, complete with crickets.

So, to all you VAR account managers, here's the question to ask next time you are in front of one of your clients: “What is the number one thing that is holding you back from buying more of our products?” Be prepared for answers such as: they are too difficult to sell, too difficult to install, the margins are too low, your buying process stinks, quit competing with us for the same customer, etc. Whatever it is, it's your responsibility to solve it if you possibly can. Drill down, get the specifics, understand the legitimacy of their claim, and then go back to your company and see how this problem can be resolved. Remember, you don't “rep”

your company; you represent your customers within your own company. So start representing them; be their spokesperson; their champion; get their concerns resolved quickly and conveniently.

Once you do, go back to that same customer and ask your question again. Keep doing this until he or she has run out of objections.

Sounds easy, right? Then why don't reps do this? Well, have you ever observed how many of these reps behave in customer meetings? Too many of them waste (yes, waste) their time (and more importantly, the customer's time) focusing solely on speeds and feeds, features and functions. Talk, talk, talk! And let's not forget their PowerPoint deck. In your next meeting, keep track of who does the majority of the talking – you or the customer. For some, this is quite an eye-opener.

...HERE'S THE QUESTION TO ASK NEXT TIME YOU ARE IN FRONT OF ONE OF YOUR CLIENTS: “WHAT IS THE NUMBER ONE THING THAT IS HOLDING YOU BACK FROM BUYING MORE OF OUR PRODUCTS?”

We have two ears, two eyes, and only one mouth for a good reason. And, unlike the ears and eyes which are fully dedicated to their respective uni-purposes, the mouth is a multi-tasker – speaking meant to be only a small portion of its many uses. Use them in the ratio in which they are intended. Listen to your customer, read his or her body language, and limit your vocal talents to question-asking only. Focus on the customer's business and market. Determine their aspirations and challenges. It's amazing what you will learn.

When you set up your next meeting with your customer, don't think of it as a sales call. Instead, think of it as a fact-finding or solution-finding call. By making just this one change in your perspective, you will go a long way to being thought of as a trusted advisor; from being another annoyance to being someone who is truly adding value. Your objective in every customer interaction should be to add value.

Remember, VARs don't need you to understand all the bits and bytes about your products, or to place their orders; they can do this themselves. So find out where they need you and deliver value for them. Do this and the sales will follow. 🍁

Keys to remember:
Listen. Watch. Probe.