

June 2004

## **Developing Sales Tools that Sizzle**

*By Karen Howard, President, Paragon Consulting*

Anyone who has spent time in a quota-carrying role knows there are numerous factors impacting success. Everything—from the product to the economy to the company’s infrastructure and politics—influences whether sales effort becomes sales achievement. As such, the sales tools your company develops and delivers to the field should always be “top of mind.” Having robust and relevant sales tools that illustrate value from a customer’s perspective can significantly improve a sales representative’s productivity and decrease the sales cycle.

Developing demos, presentations, return on investment (ROI) models, and other sales tools often falls to the marketing organization, which may or may not report to the same executive as sales. Even when the two groups do share a common reporting structure, each has vastly different charters, which can lead to discordance. To reduce potential conflicts and ensure that your sales tools support the needs of your sales team, you should keep the following simple yet essential points in mind:

- Understand who the customer is
- Recognize that brochures aren’t sales tools
- Know your audience
- Stay in sync with the sales cycle

### **Understand Who the Customer Is**

Quite often, we think the customer for our sales tools is the prospect—the buyer of our product or service. While this is certainly true, we actually have a second, equally important customer: the sales person using the tool. Sales reps converge with the customer and thus have intimate knowledge of the customer’s needs and specific demands that they must meet in order to close the deal.

It’s crucial that your company doesn’t develop sales tools in a vacuum at headquarters. Soliciting the field’s input is important if you want to create tools that sizzle with both the sales people and prospects. Additionally, spending time in the field gives you a valuable perspective on the types of questions customers are asking. A good marketer understands both how the sales force sells and how the customer buys.

### **Recognize that Brochures Aren’t Sales Tools**

No complaint is more prevalent from the sales force than, “The only thing marketing produces is ‘brochureware.’ The last thing I need is one more piece of collateral!” Glossy brochures may look impressive, but they often don’t address a prospect’s key questions. As a result, the sales person rarely uses collateral as anything other than a “leave behind.” In addition, sales people often sell complicated solutions or suites of products; thus, it’s critical that their sales tools help present the value (both tangible and intangible) of the offering. Tools that provide quantifiable results are essential.

**\*\*continued on page 2\*\***

---

Six effective sales tools that you should consider having in your “toolbox” include the following:

- **An ideal customer profile** to help the sales representative identify and target the best prospects
- **A discovery tip sheet** to qualify and determine solution fit
- **Pre-emptive competitive positioning** to proactively position the product against key competitors
- **A technical roadmap** that outlines what the current product footprint is and how it'll expand in the future
- **Customer references and success stories** that share best practices and highlight quantifiable results
- **ROI or total cost of ownership (TCO) model** to provide economic justification of the investment

### **Know Your Audience**

It's important to understand that sales people sell to a variety of stakeholders within a prospective company. In order to be successful, they need to illustrate why each individual would buy the product (motivation) and what impact it'll have on each stakeholder's key challenges (value).

Some stakeholders are executives who want to understand how the product solves a particular business challenge, such as customer satisfaction or revenue growth, and they want only a 50,000-foot overview of the product. Others are more technical in nature, all with completely different concerns and value propositions. Some sales tools are more effective with executive stakeholders, such as an ROI model, while other tools, such as the technical roadmap, speak to technical audiences.

Furthermore, companies want to feel that vendors understand their unique business challenges, so you may also need to modify a specific sales tool to address various audiences. For example, giving a telecommunications prospect a reference from a financial services customer is a surefire way to get the door closed. Modifying sales tools to speak to various segments, be it different industries or management levels, comes at a cost—both in terms of dollars spent and resources utilized—but it does lead to shorter sales cycles. In an environment where sales cycles are increasing, supplying the field with tools that help decrease the time needed to close a deal is a win-win situation for both marketing and sales.

### **Stay in Sync with the Sales Cycle**

When developing tools, make sure you align them with the sales cycle and that the field needs them. It's imperative that you map each sales tool to the sales process as part of your development planning. For example, during the prospect identification phase, sales reps will greatly benefit from an ideal customer profile. As the cycle continues toward requirements identification, they'll need tools such as pre-emptive competitive positioning, technical roadmaps, and a ROI or TCO calculator to demonstrate how the product solves a customer need.

Recognizing that sales tools must address value and motivation for a variety of audiences, including both external and internal groups, will ensure that you do indeed develop sales tools that sizzle!

*Karen Howard is the president of [Paragon Consulting Company](#), a marketing consulting firm based in the Silicon Valley that focuses on strategic market development and sales-tool development and delivery. Karen has a passion for helping high-tech and telecom companies discover and leverage their unique offerings in order to rapidly dominate their market segment.*

---

The preceding article was originally published in *Women in Consulting's Best Practices Direct* newsletter in June 2004. Learn more about Women in Consulting at [www.womeninconsulting.org](http://www.womeninconsulting.org).