Five Touchpoints to Any Sale
By Brian Jud

Whether you are selling yourself to a potential employer, to your boss for a promotion, or to a prospective buyer to purchase thousands of your books, it takes five touchpoints to make the sale. A touchpoint may be a phone call, videoconference, extended email exchange or a personal meeting.

Business-to-business selling (B2B – selling to buyers in companies, associations, military, etc.) is much different from selling to retail buyers. Selling to retailers (including bookstores) requires a distribution partner. The sales process is less time consuming because if your book doesn't sell, the stores return it. However, that is not an option for B2B buyers who purchase your book on a non-returnable basis as a promotional item.

B2B buyers have something you want (money) and you have something they want (a solution to their problem). But you cannot just meet once and ask for the order. How would you feel if someone came up to you and said, "Nice to meet you. Do you want to buy a car?" You don't know the person and probably feel he/she just wants to sell the car, not help you. That is how business buyers feel when you try to sell them something before they know anything about you or how you can help them. Proposing the sale of thousands of your books requires five points of communications, and at least three of them should be personal meetings. Here is an ideal sequence for the points of contact leading to a profitable, large, non-returnable sale.

First touchpoint. This is the meet and greet, grip and grin meeting -- like two dogs sniffing each other. You want to make a good impression, but it is too soon to begin selling. Instead, demonstrate your pedigree and discuss common links (schools, jobs, people), the information you uncovered in your pre-meeting research. This visit should take less than 30 minutes. Let them know you probably have the solution to their problem, but you need to learn more about their circumstances. You only want to leave a scent – a reason to meet again.

Second touchpoint. This could be a telephone call or video conference with the decision maker. Your goal is to learn more about the buyer's objective for the upcoming campaign, or the problem that needs to be solved.

Third touchpoint. If you are selling to a large company, this would be an exchange with another person in the decision chain. The purchasing manager, marketing manager, sales manage, HR manager – someone other than the ultimate decision maker. Your two objectives are to learn more about the problem to be solved and to develop an internal ally. Create positive word-of-mouth communication by having your ally pre-sell your proposal to the decision maker.

Fourth touchpoint. Meet personally with the decision maker to present your proposal, your recommendation about how your content can solve the buyer's business problem. Use case histories, testimonials and examples to prove your point and get your ally involved to help make your case.

Fifth touchpoint. The final meeting should be in person with the decision maker and your ally if possible. Handle any remaining objections and negotiate any open issues such as price, quantity or delivery date. Then ask for the order.

Negotiating a large book sale with a corporate buyer requires some of the same skills as playing poker. You need a little chutzpah, the creativity to recognize alternatives, the ability to assess odds, the willingness to take calculated risks and bluffing when necessary. But unlike poker, selling is not a winner-take-all game. Manage the emotional tenor of the negotiating session and bring it to a win-win conclusion.

Everyone is in a hurry these days with likes, one-click buying and retweets. And authors expect to sell their books quickly. But building a relationship with buyers for long term, recurring sales and revenue takes time. Allow the process to unfold naturally, but keep in on track with these five touch points.

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