

Dealing With Information Seekers

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You answer the telephone and hear the words, "My boss has asked me to get information and pricing on (whatever it is you sell)" and your heart sinks. It sinks because you know that dealing with information seekers is an even greater challenge than dealing with gatekeepers.

You know that whatever price you quote will be too high, particularly if you're selling a complex or technical product or service, and then you won't get a chance to make your case.

The problem is that neither the person calling you nor her/his boss seem to appreciate that you need more information about their situation before you can give a proper price. They just want price and information and don't understand why you can't just give it to them and let them make their own decision.

Two Big Problems

You're faced with two big problems. One, you have questions you need to ask and two, the person you're talking with probably doesn't know the answers.

Adding to your grief is the fact that the information seeker is expected to bring back answers to her boss, not more questions. So, without embarrassing the person, you need to let her know that what she is being asked to do is no easy task.

Empathize and Confuse

Here's one method of handling the problem. Let's use a mythical product called a Transitory Molecular Discriminator, or TMD for short, as an example.

Phase one is to empathize with the person. Show that you know the boss has put her between a rock and a hard place and that you're going to try to help her out.

Information Seeker: "Hi. My boss has asked me to get information and pricing on your Transitory Molecular Discriminators."

Salespro: "I'd be pleased to help. Tell me, how familiar are you with TMDs?"

Information Seeker: "Not very, but my boss only wants me to get information and prices."

Salespro: "Wow. That puts you in a bit of an awkward spot because I need to ask a bunch of questions before I can give you what you're looking for."

Information Seeker: "Can't you just give me price and information?"

Salespro: "Not really. I'll need to ask a few questions first. Would that be OK?"

Phase two of this technique is to have a set of questions that the information seeker probably can't answer. After confusing or baffling her with a few gems you can say:

Salespro: "It would probably be better if I could chat with your boss about this. Can you arrange for me to talk with him?"

Hopefully you'll be able to get through to the decision maker. The key to using this technique is to have a list of the questions you would normally ask if you were dealing with an informed prospect. They should be legitimate questions intended to qualify the prospect, not questions that are deliberately chosen to cause confusion. The longer the list the better, but be careful to not ask stupid questions.

If the information seeker balks at letting you talk to the boss, you might offer to send her a list of the questions you want/need answered. At least it shows the prospect you're organized.

When Pressed for Price

Remember these four rules when pressed to give pricing information.

1. Whenever possible, don't discuss price until you've established value.
2. If forced to give a price prematurely, only offer a range ("Prices range from \$A to \$Z.")
3. When offering a range, your low end should be your lowest possible price.
4. Always add 10 to 20 percent to your high end. It's a lot easier to go back with a lower price than a higher one. If the customer is going to choke on your artificially high price, he'll choke on your real top end price, and you'll lose the advantage of being able to quote a final price that is lower than he expected.

What if whatever you're selling only has one price? Read rule one again. Try to get control of the situation by saying something like this:

Information Seeker: "I'm just looking for a price."

Salespro: "I understand. I'm always hesitant to discuss price until I have a chance to establish value or, at a minimum, a need. May I ask a few questions first?"

Now you're back to the technique outlined above — empathize and confuse. If she persists on just wanting a price, you may have a "price shopper" rather than an "information collector." We'll address the challenges of dealing with price shoppers in a future article. If you are dealing with an information collector and not a price shopper, you have one other option and that is to...

Give In and Give Up

While I recommend you always offer a price range rather than one price, not every product lends itself to this approach. If the only choice you can give a customer is to take it or leave it, consider the following.

With this option, you simply give the price and move on because you know the person is going to tell you your price is too high. Remember, every price is too high if you haven't established value.

If the information seeker doesn't choke on your price, you may have an opportunity to actually establish value, but in my experience that rarely happens.

Be Helpful

The key is to not try to go around the information seeker but to help her understand that she's in a difficult situation and you want to help her out.

These techniques won't always work but they are sure worth a try