

41 Proven Tactics for Winning More Business

By Dave Stein, Author of *How Winners Sell*

A well thought-out strategy should be the foundation of every sales campaign. But once the battle is on, it is the tactics we devise and execute that often make the difference between winning and losing.

Here are some of the tactics that have enabled my clients' sales reps to outsell the competition and win the sale:

1. If you don't want to be perceived as just another interchangeable sales rep, don't call on an executive without having researched their industry, company, and them. What you learn will provide you with a foundation upon which to build credibility and differentiate yourself.
2. Many deals are lost because they were never effectively qualified. Ask the right questions from the right people, again and again. Seek the truth.
3. To further your career, recruit a mentor or a personal coach. The best athletes and most effective business people have them. If you think you don't need one, you probably do.
4. Tell your customer the truth before your competitor spins it.
5. Speak with a key buyer in an account where you have won business. Ask him specifically what, if anything, your competition did to try to upset your victory. Chances are the competitor will try that again in another opportunity.
6. Don't trumpet your competitor's weaknesses. That's negative selling. Ask well-planned questions that will enable your prospect to figure those weaknesses out themselves.
7. If you are involved in a qualified, complex sales campaign, become an expert in your customer's business, like a consultant would be.
8. Always have at least three qualification questions ready to ask your prospect.
9. Differentiate yourself through your questions. What is the best question you could ask the real buyer the first time you meet that would make them sit up and take notice? Hint: "What keeps you up at night," isn't the answer.
10. Analyze your customer's financial statements. Know exactly where and how you will improve their business situation. If you can't do it yourself, get some help. To paraphrase Nike: Don't not do it.
11. Read two business magazines every week. Learn something you didn't know before. Figure out how to use that information to your advantage.
12. Never make contact with a customer (even an administrator) without providing something worthwhile for them. Information is always valuable. So is an introduction to a customer of yours who overcame similar challenges.
13. Practice simple math tricks that will enable you to figure numbers quickly. It's a valuable skill.
14. After getting their permission, send your prospects high-value emails containing articles, press releases, etc. These should be personalized (not blind copied on a distribution list), with a brief, relevant comment as an introduction.

15. If you work for a large company and are competing against a smaller one, get things done quickly so you appear nimble to your prospect.
16. If you work for a small company, learn precisely how to use that to your advantage. You can be certain your bigger competitors will attempt to portray your company's size as a weakness.
17. Answer questions truthfully, especially when the answer is "no." Executives will test your integrity by asking a question to which they know (or suspect) the answer. You must pass the first time.
18. Don't start selling until you understand what your customer is looking to buy. Only then can you effectively influence their vision of a solution.
19. If your prospect asks for something from you, make sure you get something in return, such as information or access to a decision maker.
20. Closing should never be a surprise nor contentious. Make sure your prospect knows what to expect when you schedule the meeting. Solicit any objections in advance.
21. Test your proposal with your coach in the account first, before submitting it to the real buyer.
22. If you have to depend on a lower-level person for presenting your proposal to the real buyer, make sure you have trained them to sell it upstairs. That includes handling objections, competitive positioning, and cost justification.
23. If you don't want to get trapped, don't do what your competition thinks you are going to do.
24. Consider showing your coach in the account your sales plan. Under the right circumstances, it will impress them and differentiate you.
25. If you are doing a web-based presentation or demo, email the slides to your prospect in advance, just in case the technology fails.
26. If you are going to be meeting or presenting to a prospect, call as many of the attendees in advance as possible. Introduce yourself and find out what their expectations and issues are.
27. Don't invite executives and lower-level people to the same meeting or presentation. It is nearly impossible to meet the needs of both constituencies. Schedule two meetings instead.
28. Tie your product or service into your customer's achievement of a specific goal or objective. Discuss the benefits in their terms, not yours. Quantify those benefits.
29. List three reasons you might lose the deal. Make sure none of those happen.
30. Protect yourself against no-shows. Make sure you know who will be attending a meeting. If there's someone in particular you want to attend, negotiate it well in advance. If that person is not available, offer to reschedule. Important: Get your prospect's word that if a key person who has agreed to be there does not show up, you will meet with that person later. Your negotiating position is stronger before the meeting takes place.
31. Ask people in your prospect's company how they bought the last product or service that is comparable to yours. That will often yield insights into their buying and decision process.
32. Convert your prospect's organization chart into a political map to see who else may be involved in the decision.
33. Is your competitor effective at selling? Find out whether they made quota last year. If not, why. If so, why?
34. Begin searching early for someone in the account who you can coach and train to help you win.
35. Perform a formal debriefing with everyone who participates in a customer meeting. Collect observations, action items, objections.
36. When someone else on your team is presenting, face the audience if you can. That way you can observe their reactions to what is being said.
37. Invest in a book on body language. It will help you understand what your customer is not saying.

38. Require a formal account briefing with everyone who will participate in a customer meeting, even your CEO. Coach everyone on their role. Prepare your team with objections and issues that might be raised during the meeting.
39. Ask your customer what will happen if they don't buy when they say they will. If they don't have a good answer, the deal may not close when you think.
40. How does the real buyer make decisions? By gut, by consensus, or by the recommendation of their right-hand person? That's something you'll need to find out.
41. Learn how your customer competes in their market. Is it on price? Innovation? Service? Technology? Reliability? What's important to their customers is probably important to them.

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About the Author

Before his career in high-tech, Dave earned a living as a professional trumpet player and musical arranger. University-trained and extremely versatile, Dave played everything from chamber music to the Chambers Brothers. Dave learned to leverage the discipline and logical thinking of a musician first into a career as a programmer, executive, and then into his current role of sales coach, consultant and strategist.

From 1980 until he founded The Stein Advantage, Dave was employed by several leading-edge technology companies in a number of roles: programmer, systems engineer, sales representative, sales manager, Director of Worldwide Sales Development, VP of Sales, VP of Marketing, VP of International Operations, VP of Client Services and VP of Strategic Alliances.

For more than a year during the early 1990's Dave lived and worked in Europe, bootstrapping international operations for the technology company he helped to build.

For the past decade, Dave has focused on training, speaking to and coaching experienced sales teams and their executives in 48 states and 23 countries. His unique skills in competitive sales strategies and selling business value at the executive levels has enabled those sales professionals with whom he has worked to win more than a billion dollars of business against what were insurmountable odds.

Dave has worked with larger enterprises such as IBM, Convergys, Enterprise Ireland, Hewlett-Packard, ALLTEL, Bayer, Standard Register, NEC, Siemens, Invensys, Pitney Bowes, MCI, AT&T, Sungard Energy Systems and McGraw-Hill, as well as many small companies in numerous industries.

Within the past year, along with many other projects, Dave has:

- Trained professional services teams on how to transform customer needs into billable projects
- Coached more than 30 CEOs on various issues related to growth, product strategy, competitiveness and profitability
- Coached VPs of Sales who were facing difficult challenges due to changes in the buying patterns of their primary markets
- Assisted CEOs in successfully hiring critical executive positions
- Worked as a strategist with sales teams winning critical, large opportunities
- Coached under-performing sales reps on specific skills required for consistent performance
- Delivered many content-rich educational, entertaining and motivational kick-off speeches and workshops
- Provided marketing services including branding, product management, pricing, analyst relations, etc.

Dave Stein is the author of the Amazon number one sales best selling *How Winners Sell: 21 Strategies to Outsell Your Competition and Win the Big Sale, Second Edition* (May 2004). He regularly contributes to leading sales journals, business magazines and business sections of newspapers. Dave writes fresh, relevant articles each month to a large audience in his opt-in e-Zine available through his website.