

THE CUSTOMER WHISPERER | BY GREG BILLINGS

Presentation: Part 1

We've seen how asking engaging questions while exercising calm, assertive leadership puts the customer whisperer firmly in control of the dialog and positions him to guide clients through the decision-making process. Now, the fun part. We'll discover how a compelling presentation can enhance his credibility. Greeting and qualification are every bit as important as closing, but let's face it, they're not fun, sexy or exciting. Presentations, on the other hand, can be educational and entertaining and, at the same time, fun and exciting. It's showtime!

+ CUSTOMER WHISPERER:

A calm/assertive sales associate who gently turns prospects into customers.



The customer whisperer uses the presentation to enhance his credibility, building upon the rapport he created earlier. People are likely to take the recommendation of someone they trust and view as knowledgeable. A caring expert might be just what your clients are looking for when they call or visit your store for the first time.

THE SETUP

Like any show, a presentation must be staged. The instrument at the presentation center is clean, in tune and easily disassembleable (if necessary). Sales aids, part models, software or POP materials are handy, and the area is properly illuminated.

The customer whisperer goes to his presentation center at every opportunity. It is his comfort zone. He knows what he's going to show, and it probably won't be to the product the client will eventually select. It will be the instrument around which he has composed his pitch.

RAPPORT FIRST

Effective presentations demand precise timing. Showing products too quickly can be fatal. We've all had customers who, having been shown exactly what they requested, thank us, turn on their heels and leave. Our eyes drop to

to qualification by simply asking, "Do you mind if I ask a few questions?" The step from qualification to presentation is easily accomplished with another of our transition questions, albeit a much more probing and challenging one: "Do you know what to look for in a (piano, guitar, mixer, trumpet, etc.)?"

One of two wonderful things will happen here. Most often, the client will say "no." The customer whisperer seizes the moment and says, "Great, let's take a few minutes, and I'll give you a quick overview before we start looking at specific instruments." Without hesitation, he proceeds to the presentation center.

The other, less common, response is "Yes!" Now, we know our prospect already has an expert or thinks he's an expert. The customer whisperer knows there can be only one expert. With calm assurance he looks his prospect square in the eye and says, "Great, what is the most important thing to you?" It doesn't really matter what the prospective client says or who his expert is. The cus-

Presentation is an opportunity to become the caring expert customers are looking for

the floor in humiliation as we try to explain what happened to our manager. Salespeople are at least partly responsible for racing to the product. Shoppers can be forgiven for seeking instant gratification, but the customer whisperer knows it will be too late to establish rapport and gain control of the process once customers have found their way to the goodies. Without establishing rapport and gaining control, closing is going to be difficult, if not impossible. His clients are definitely going to get "the pitch" before they see any products.

You'll remember how the customer whisperer moved elegantly from greeting

tomers will calmly and assertively up the ante by establishing doubt.

A real conversation with a prospect might go like this:

Customer Whisperer: What is the most important thing to you?

Prospective Client: A multi-ply pin plank.

CW: I'm glad to hear that you've focused in on tuning stability. Nothing sounds good if it's out of tune, and you don't want to have the tuner there every other day. Are you more concerned about the number of plies, the thickness of the plies, the curing process or whether the plies are maple, beech or a hybrid?

PC: Ugh, what's a hybrid?

CW: Come over here, and I'll show you a few pin plank samples. It will make a lot of sense.

Consider the process. First we agree, next we show sincere enthusiasm and, finally, we raise the bar. We are completely non-confrontational in our confrontation, and we have assumed the position of helpful expert.

At last, we have found our way to the presentation center. The process has been slowed down, and we have our client's full attention. Focus has been diverted from products, and the customer whisperer is clearly leading. He's ready to start the show.

THE PITCH

It's not advisable, reasonable or possible to tell our clients everything we know about our product. They don't have the capacity or inclination to assimilate that much information. In the post-MTV era, we can't expect to hold their attention for more than a few minutes, and like most people, our clients are looking for simple answers to complicated questions.

A generation ago, we were taught presentations couldn't last more than 19 minutes. Today we have much less time — probably less than 10 minutes. Our message must be informative, interesting, entertaining and focused. The customer whisperer has refined, rehearsed and perfected his pitch until he could recite it in his sleep. He's going to let his passion show, but he's going to remain calm. Fortunately, he has a secret weapon. Unlike other presenters of other products, he can employ music's powerful emotional impact. He will use music in short, powerful bursts.

When I was a rep, I had the opportunity to meet many of the greatest salespeople of the previous generation. Invariably, when I asked about the secret of their success, they talked about their presentation. In a strange way, they all said the same thing. Whether it was the five features of a good piano; the three Ts of tone, touch and tuning stability; or the eight secrets of Steinway,

'Have your clients touch instruments to feel vibrations. Have them push buttons and turn knobs.'

there was always a catchy headline followed by a simple, memorable (7- to 10-minute) general explanation of the product that established their expertise, concluding with a clever musical flourish. They did the same pitch every time they made a presentation. Over time, it had been refined and adjusted, but it was always a sincere effort to communicate their personal wisdom in a way clients could easily understand. Most important, it established their expertise.

The presumptive customer whisperer must prepare his

pitch — a general explanation of the fundamental construction or technical features of his product(s) that can be delivered quickly and confidently in an engaging, entertaining way. This pitch must assure his customer that he knows what he's talking about.

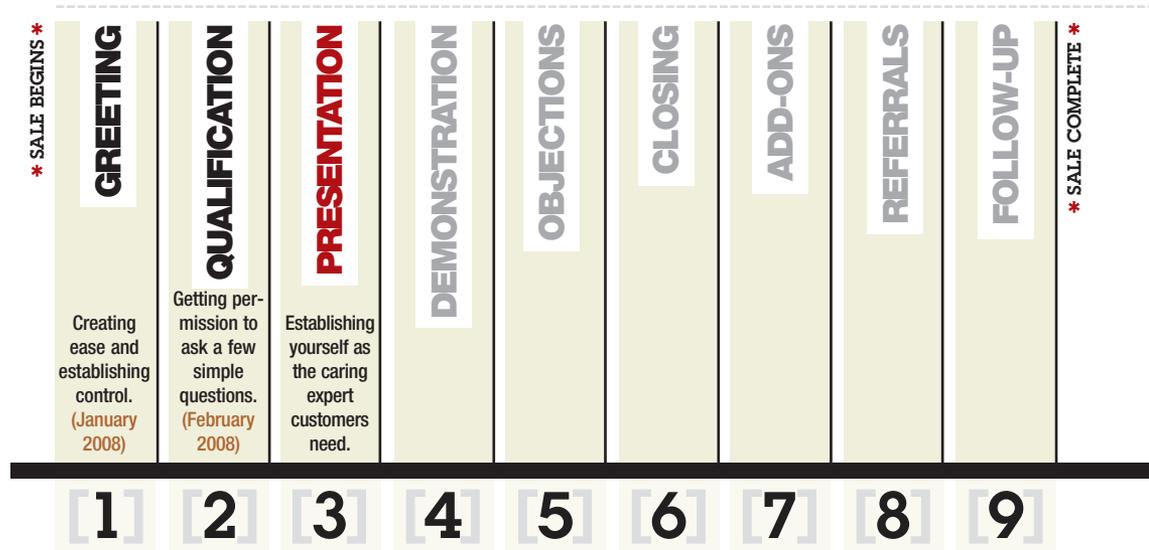
Here's an example: "This is an electric guitar. It's comprised of four parts — a body, a neck, hardware and electronics. Here's how each of these parts is important, what they could or should be made of, and why that is important to you." It doesn't matter what the product or service is. It matters that the customer begins to view the customer whisperer as knowledgeable.

KEEP IT INTERACTIVE

Veteran sales trainer Gay Hufstader used to say, "Tell 'em you're gonna tell 'em. Tell 'em! And tell 'em you told 'em." Your presentation must be engaging. Have your clients

+ THE SALES PROCESS

The customer whisperer organizes the sales process into nine stages. For those he has already discussed, we've given a brief explanation and the issue of *Music Inc.* they appeared in. Go to musicincmag.com to download these articles.



touch instruments to feel vibrations. Have them push buttons and turn knobs. Have them hold products to feel the weight.

The customer whisperer knows he's in trouble if he's talking and his prospect is passively listening. He asks confirmation questions, like "Does that make sense?" "Doesn't that sound great?" "Is that what you had in mind?" or "Isn't that cool?" to keep his client actively involved in the process. If clients get accustomed to saying little "yeses," it's going to be a lot easier for them to say a big "yes" later on.

Because the pitch is his own personal wisdom, the customer whisperer delivers it effortlessly while he processes what he learned during qualification. He will also observe his clients' reac-

tions. By the time his 10 minutes in the spotlight have expired, he intuitively knows what product he's going to demonstrate. As the pitch ends, his client is interested, involved and happy to have met an expert he can trust.

The transition to the demonstration, where for the first time we'll be looking at actual products to buy, will be accomplished with another elegantly simple transition question. The customer whisperer will say, "I have something in mind that might be just right for you. Would you like to see it?"

Oddly, the customer whisperer hasn't done any selling — yet. He hasn't taken a position; he hasn't endorsed a brand or made a recommendation. To do so would undermine his credibility before his clients have come

to view him as a caring expert. However, during the pitch, he has planted seeds that will bloom during the demonstration.

In our next installment, the selling begins. The customer whisperer will consider the

proper way to present features as benefits and the importance of presenting three choices — good, better and best. Until then, start working on your pitch. **MI**

Greg Billings whispers to customers at the Steinway Piano Gallery in Bonita Springs, Fla.

+ 7 STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL PRESENTATION

- Slow down the process. Don't get there too soon.
- Get permission. Ask, "Do you know what to look for...?"
- Go to your presentation center — every time.
- Practice your pitch until it is perfect.
- Keep clients engaged by having them touch products and by asking conformation questions.
- Finish with a powerful musical flourish.
- Become their expert.

Huge innovation in a new package.

The new Vandoren Flow Pack packaging. Every reed we make is now wrapped in humidity balanced packaging resulting in reeds that are factory fresh. The most remarkable part of this innovation is you don't have to do anything to benefit from it. No special storage, no little bags...nothing. Just put them in the store and watch your customers marvel at the consistency and quality you provide...at no extra cost.

It's a huge innovation, but that's what Vandoren is all about...one huge innovation after another.



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