

Closing the Credibility Gap

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By David Yoho, CPAE

More business is lost due to the credibility Gap than because of your price. Credibility is earned by your actions, not from some self-serving speech about your list of customers, years in business, your awesome services or the depth of your product line.

I've observed thousands of initial sales calls both in person and by phone; almost every rep attempted to sell credibility with a story rather than with preparation, investigation and research.

Your "company story" will be more believable

later, when it reinforces the value they they've already seen in your performance.

Credibility is the result of creating a strong position. You may work for a company whose reputation is strong enough to gain that position for you, although it's risky to rely on that. You've earned credibility when someone believes you know what's best for them. The best means to earn credibility is to ensure that prospects see the depth and substance of your investigation and preparation.

It isn't enough to ask questions, especially if the questions are too basic. Here's an example. If you ask an executive for information you could have learned on their website or from a subordinate, you're wasting their time. You've actually provided evidence that you don't know how to serve them. Why would they believe that your organization's customer service is any better?

And you won't earn credibility if you ask a "leading" question (one in which the answer is obvious). I watched a financial planner ask a wealthy prospect, "Would you like to make more money next year?" The prospect's sardonic grin indicated that the planner's position was ruined unless she could do something miraculous. She didn't.

Credibility is enhanced when prospects see the quantity and quality of your preparation.

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Rather than bragging about it, ask for permission to verify the information you've obtained. When face-to-face, they should see a file

crammed with their annual report, advertisements, press releases, marketing materials, copies of their web pages (and their competitors), notes from interviews, marketing data, surveys and more.

Document your questions in advance - create space for the answers. If you're speaking by phone, your questions should be prepared in customized user fields or in a word document. If you're conducting a live interview, use ivory-colored paper and take notes in blue. It'll be easier for both of you to see what you've accomplished.

When your questions are documented, you can speed the process, saving their time and yours. The faster you accomplish this step, the easier it is to keep the prospect focused and for you to control the emotional flow.

When your questions are documented, you won't have to think about what to ask next; you'll just glance at your list. Then, you'll

invest your energy listening to and understanding the prospect's situation, beliefs, motives and values.

You'll be totally present and you'll ask more penetrating follow up questions.

Integrate these ideas and you'll close the credibility gap. You can sum all this up with an easy-to-remember ***Yohoism***: The difference between a presentation and a recommendation is an examination



David Yoho provides systems and customized education that helps organizations outthink, outsell, outmaneuver and outnegotiate their competition without sacrificing profit or integrity.

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