

THE BIG PICTURE: INFORMATIONAL SERIES

AVOIDING THE FIVE MOST COMMON SCENARIOS FOR A STALLED SALE

Think about your sales forecast. What percentage of your pipeline suffers from stalled opportunities? If you're like most, it's easily between 30% and 50%. In a slowing economy, one of the most strategic tacks you can take is to reduce the impact of stalled decisions. After reviewing hundreds of stalled opportunities we've identified the five most common scenarios for a sale.

1. **Risk**

Selecting a new vendor or a new solution involves risk for the buyer. Making any decision today in business comes with its own career impact. The prospect's perception of risk can span business pain like lost time or money; or personal ramifications like reputation. Common tools for alleviating risk include supplying references, trials, pilots, iron-clad implementation plans, or performance guarantees.

2. **Lack of Connection to a Critical Business Issue**

Unless your solution has increased revenue, sped time to market, cut costs, or improved quality or some other looming business issue tied to it, you can expect a stall. As budgets have

tightened, senior executives are only spending on matters that directly impact their business. Use your questioning skills to find the top 5 or 6 issues on their radar and address as many as you can with your solution.

3. **Decision Authority**

You've heard it before but this is the most common cause. The buying frenzy of the late '90s all but eliminated the need to call on the real decision makers for everyday purchases. Now due to tight budgets, they are re-involved in the majority of new purchases. Aim high in the organization and be prepared to have business discussions. Confirm pain points so you get an accurate vision of what the prospect might be envisioning as a remedy.

4. **Lack of Differentiation**

Lack of differentiation will cause the prospect to spend more time evaluating, which translates to a stall. If they cannot find additional differentiation you can bet that they will pressure you to differentiate on price. Choose categories such as speed, flexibility, ease of use, cost/value and peace of mind.

5. **Lack of Perceived Value**

Most senior managers can really only juggle five or six critical issues at a time. If your solution, from their perspective, doesn't have enough value to get into their top five or six, you get stalled or put on the back burner. Ask the prospect to quantify the impact of resolving the business issue, and determine how the solution will impact them both personally and from a business standpoint. My favorite question to ask: lets assume you were getting ready for your next meeting with your agenda scribed on a flip chart in your office. The CEO walks by and says "that's going to be a GREAT meeting." The answer to this question not only gives you the 5-6 critical business issues of the day, it tests the alignment of the buyer with the goals of the CEO.