

Value-Building Proposals

Help customers see why your solutions are the best

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People will pay more for something they consider to be better. That is a given. Think about it. Have you paid more for a product or service because you believed it to be better in some way? Would you ever expect to pay the same price for a Kia as a Tesla? Have you witnessed the difference between a Hoover vacuum cleaner and a Dyson?

Have you had cheap food compared to quality food? You have and you know what I mean. People pay for better. You do it. I do it. We all do it. When the value and difference is obvious, there is an expected increase in price. This is the goal we aim to reach in our sales. We need to clearly show why our prospects should pay more when doing business with us.

The only challenge here is how a dealership can take its products and services — which many view as commodities — and build enough value to have a prospect see its offerings as superior and worth the price increase. Sound difficult? It does not have to be. This is why having a process around building value is essential to any growing sales organization.

In the Value Building 101 series, we have focused on three main parts:

- (1) Criteria Discovery:** How we go about understanding what matters to your customer
- (2) Sales Process:** How we incorporate value-building steps into our sales cycle
- (3) Proposals:** How we present our business case for differentiation

I covered part one — criteria discovery — in the February 2024 Office Technology article, “Value Building 101.” I covered part two — how to create a sales process that fosters value building — in the March 21, 2024, BTA Building My Business webinar, “How to Include Value Building In Your Sales Process.” This month, I will finish up the three-part series with proposals and how we present our business case for differentiation.

Steph Curry & Nike

Steph Curry had always dreamed of becoming a Nike



ambassador. He would be on Team Nike, get his own shoe and make millions of dollars in endorsements. That dream changed right after his proposal meeting with Nike’s ambassador team.

The story goes (and you can look this up) like this: On the day of Steph Curry’s meeting with Nike, the company’s normal

pitch guy who was supposed to present the proposal was not there for some unknown reason. The team members standing in for that individual proceeded to refer to Steph as “Steve” and also showed him a proposal that still had one of his previous colleagues’ names on it, Kevin Durant. As you can imagine, this offended Curry, which led him to choose not to sign with Nike and instead sign on with Under Armour. Nike blundered its chance to sign a basketball legend and it occurred 100% inside of the proposal part of the process.

What can we learn from the Nike team members’ mistakes here? They failed to make Steph Curry feel special in their proposal presentation and didn’t make him feel like he was the winner in the end. It was more about Nike than Steph. They didn’t show appreciation for the opportunity.

Shocking right? Although I want to believe our dealerships do things differently, this situation is more common than you think. The proposals I see across the nation are terrible. They mirror Nike’s laziness. A sales leader or president would only need to perform a surprise inspection of the proposals being presented by their sales teams to come away feeling disgusted and embarrassed.

Many dealers across the country have implemented proposal templates to ensure the right information is shared with customers. However, we cannot forget that proposals should be tailored to each customer’s individual needs. You knew that when you created the templates. The proposal should be about the customer’s company, not yours. Without customization, you just have a shallow template that does not do anything except talk about your company — and your customers know it.

A Proposal Template Versus a Proposal That Builds Value

A proposal template is about you and your company, while a proposal that builds value is about the customer's company and how your solution can help it achieve its goals. One of these is interesting for the customer to engage with and the other is boring. Everything is more interesting when we can see ourselves inside of it.

Think about those personality tests you have taken over the years (DiSC, StrengthsFinder, Myers Briggs) — the ones where you had to answer all those questions and then the system gave you custom-tailored, written responses about who you are and your areas of opportunity. I bet you read through every single line of those responses. Why? Because they were about you! Your proposals should aim to get to the same place of interest with your customers.

Making a Proposal More About Your Customer

How much do we know about our customer? That is when we go back to the beginning of value building (see part one on criteria discovery). How did we prepare for that first appointment? How did we bring expertise, what did we learn about our customer from our research and what criteria did we discover in our meeting? What opportunities did we find and what next steps did we choose to explore further? How did we diagnose (see the recording of my March 21 webinar at www.bta.org/BMBArchives) the customer's challenges, and what solutions did we both find and prove out to our customer?

When you follow a value-building process, you learn more about the customer's company. You become its advocate and you go on a quest to find a better solution for what it is doing today. Everything you do is about the customer.

When you follow a sales process of building value, you have an open dialog of communication throughout the process. When you get to the proposal stage, what is left is for you to take the time to connect all the dots in your final summary proposal. I have found that proposal templates that do this well include, at a minimum, the following pages:

(1) Relevant cover page — The cover page is the customer's first impression of your proposal. You should aim for him (or her) to look at it and think, "Wow. This is really made for us." Think about how you could use the company's images, logo and terminology.

(2) Criteria/challenge page — The criteria page is where you answer the customer's question: "Why are we looking at this solution again?" This could be a legitimate question from a decision-maker hiding somewhere in the shadows.

The best proposals I have seen show this criteria page in

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the form of quotes heard from the customer throughout the sales process. These quotes should highlight the challenges the customer's company has been facing, how critical they are and the importance of solving them. When you show your solution as being more expensive than what the customer has today, this page should really emphasize: "You get what you pay for. You need to invest in a better solution so you don't continue

to have the same problems."

(3) Technology face-off comparison page — It is normal for the customer to wonder, "What makes the product/solution different from what we are using today?" We are used to comparing solutions. Amazon built a business around this concept of comparisons and it is proof that consumers like it.

Our products and solutions are not an easy thing to compare for our customers. In fact, our customers will not want to go down that rabbit hole. They will more often jump to the conclusion that if no one is comparing the solutions then they must all be comparable, which is not the truth. That is why we need to do this for them.

The best salespeople showcase those improvements inside of a proof of concept or a tailored demo for the customer that brings to life how easily its challenges can be removed forever. The proposal should have a spreadsheet-like comparison table that reminds the customer which options are unique and how those contribute to a better-fit solution for his company.

(4) Vendor face-off comparison page — No vendor is the same. I have seen it firsthand working with dealers across the country. Every company has its own unique advantages that, in many cases, are not being clearly explained to prospects.

The worst proposals I have seen showcase pages that focus just on sales reps' companies. They are proud of what those pages say, but the problem is they do not help the customer compare those attributes to other vendors in the area. Just like with the technology face-off above, the vendor comparison should be retooled to challenge the customer to ask other vendors if they have the same credentials, offerings and support. Remember, it is normal for us to ask him to compare. We are looking for his company's business in the long term. Shouldn't it be obvious that he should go with you after he does that due diligence?

(5) Financial TCO comparison page — What is the business case for your solution? Does it cost justify with how much the company is spending today from its direct and indirect costs? If you have taken the time during the sales process to diagnose the company's challenges, you should have the costs of how much it is spending today and the costs that come as a result of the inefficiencies it has today. You should have gotten these costs from the customer and even had

conversations about this prior to presenting your proposal. All of this should be captured inside of a total-cost-of-ownership (TCO) page that highlights how much the company is spending today, keeping in mind all of the costs associated with those areas compared to how your recommended solution will solve it all. Remember, people will pay for better. They do it every single day.

(6) Executive unique-offer page —

Everyone wants to get a special deal before they buy something. It is human nature. Your customer is no different. You have a choice here. Do you want to present something and then be stuck waiting for an answer, hoping that it will come in? Or do you want to set up this deal with a reason, on top of everything else, to do it now — on your time frame? That is why you do an executive unique offer. Build that special gift into your price so you are not discounting after the fact.

(7) Agreements/DocuSign — If you have done everything right and it is all there for the customer, there is only one question remaining: “Are we ready to move forward?” Whether you have the contracts printed out for the customer or sent over via a digital signature solution like DocuSign, it should be a statement from you saying, “We have been through a lot in this process and I know this is the best solution for your company. Let’s move forward to the next step.”

Value-Building Series Summary

In every organization, there are salespeople who are having incredible success and making good money. It becomes our mission to replicate that type of success and performance, as it is necessary for our growth. As leaders, we may look at these salespeople and think the answer is solely in recruiting more of these talented individuals.

The solution, however, is inside of how we teach value

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building at our organizations. It starts with the process of uncovering criteria that we use inside of our first appointments. It continues with how we set up sales processes for our teams to follow that foster becoming more like technology consultants, and build trust and confidence around our solutions. Ultimately, it finishes with how we bring it all together by connecting those dots in the proposal.

Remember that people will pay more

for better. We all do it every day. Make sure you are applying a process that helps your customers see why your solutions are the best for their companies. ■

Derek Shebby, founder of Modern Sales Training, spent 17 years as a top sales executive and sales director with Mr. Copy (MRC)/Xerox in San Diego, California. MRC was the largest Xerox agent in the nation before being acquired by Global Imaging Systems in 2009. During his tenure, Shebby oversaw the performance and development of hundreds of salespeople and sales leaders across the state. Specializing in the entire sales process, he helped grow MRC from \$40 million to more than \$100 million in annual revenue (30 to 500 employees). Since 2020, Shebby has coached dealership sales managers, vice presidents and presidents to sales growth and profitability by implementing proven industry strategies and modern sales leadership processes. Be sure to check out his new Value Building Workshop starting this month. Shebby also runs a sales boot camp that is being utilized by the top dealers in the country, has an MPS workshop (sponsored by Clover) and a sales community called OUTLIERS. He can be reached at derek@modernsalestraining.com and has exclusive sales trainings for BTA members at www.modernsalestraining.com/BTA. Visit www.modernsalestraining.com.

