

Selling in times of recession

In times of crisis, only the imagination is more important than knowledge.

Albert Einstein

For some time now we have been in a strong recession. This has complicated the life of all the people and businesses that are engaged in a complex sale. However, the recession does not mean that companies do not buy, it only means that they evaluate investments more carefully.

A complex sale usually involves a high investment, either of high value services, consultancy or capital goods, such as machinery or information technology. In times of crisis, the money becomes more cautious, investments are scrutinised with a magnifying glass and any purchase competes strongly with other possibilities for the use of the same scarce money.

Sibelius research amongst companies in different sectors, such as the medical, manufacturing and technology industries, confirms that in times of crisis the sale changes and the financial aspects of buying take more relevance. The purchasing department takes special relevance in the decision-making process. In general, price gains in importance among the decision criteria and purchases with a return on investment of more than 6 to 9 months are not considered. Uncertainty about the future frequently advises that investments should be postponed if they exceed that period.

In this environment the skills required by the salesperson have to adapt to the situation. In order to help contacts (usually more technical than financial) to persuade their companies of the benefits of what they sell, it is necessary to acquire a deeper understanding of the client's problems. Observations carried out by *Sibelius* show that, in the majority of sales interviews, the sales people left without investigating important areas of the client's difficulties and therefore significant savings that could differentiate the solution and contribute significantly to the justification of purchase are ignored.

An optimist sees an opportunity in every challenge; a pessimist sees a challenge at every opportunity.

Winston Churchill

In these times of constant challenges for sales activity, experience shows that some companies come out strengthened from difficult times. These companies manage to increase their market share in times of recession by taking better advantage of the crisis conditions. Whether you sell directly or through distribution, if your salesforce know how to thoroughly probe the needs of the client, discover all their problems and investigate the costs associated with each problem, they can help their contacts to understand and justify the investments and obtain the scarce funds available for the products and services that they sell.

During the *Sibelius* research project it became clear that salespeople using this approach had a clear advantage. They sell more, have greater control over the sale and the customer often describes them with words such as "resource" or "consultant". The most valued skills are questioning, listening and understanding the customers' business. However research concludes that these behaviors occur only in a small percentage of the interviews.

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