PERSONAL SELLING

SUCCESSFUL SALES CALLS AND FACE TO FACE MEETINGS

Face-to-face sales calls/meetings are a very effective way to build meaningful and trusting relationships with both potential new business clients and existing clients, so a strategic and proactive approach to personal selling is imperative.

As well as regular meetings with your key contact, and once you have built credibility for yourself, your company and product, you can ask for the opportunity to present to their full team. The purpose would be to educate their staff on Ireland, your region and your offering, so they are able to more confidently sell your product/service. In effect, you should treat their sales team as an extension of your own, keeping them informed and up to date on how best to sell your product.

TOP TIP

People buy from People…In B2B Channels it is all about the relationship!

The connection, through shared understanding and mutual respect that you build with each of your distribution partners and clients is crucial to the success of the relationship.

Maintaining regular contact and providing relevant updated product information with regional news on ancillary services/experiences as well as demonstrating efficiency, effective listening skills and adopting a professional business approach in all communications and negotiations is key for strong, trusting and lasting relationships to flourish.

Visiting B2B Partners/New Prospects

Businesses often wonder how often they should personally visit their B2B channel partners. This depends on how much business they are generating for you, or how much they could potentially generate in the future… but as a rule of thumb, once a year works well for those In-Ireland partners. In the case of online channel partners, it may be common place to have 1-2 meetings per year, often at your business location. These visits may be combined with some online back end system training that they can provide for you and your online channel sales team.

For Indirect Traditional Channel operators/partners, if you have time and resources to go and meet those in market, this is very helpful to developing the relationship and demonstrates the importance and value you attribute to the business they service you with, but this is not always feasible for you or the operator in terms of budget and time/matching availability.

How and when to plan and arrange appointments

If you are travelling in-market for another sales event/trade show it is usually better value to add sales calls onto the before or after of the event, if travel distances/connections allow. This facilitates you to plan direct meetings with operators at their offices, if your contact with their business, is not attending the in-market event you are travelling for.

Ideally these visits are designed outside of your In-Ireland Sales Events like Meitheal or ITOA workshops, which only allow for short 5-7 minute meetings. These independently planned and agreed meetings outside of sales event platforms, should be factored into your team structure/schedules as well as marketing activity plan and budget.

Appointments should be booked at least a month in advance and should be with the contact who is the Product Manager for Ireland or the Business Owner/Senior Contracting Executive. If it is a larger company, possibly with a number of frontline sales staff, and as you build a relationship over time, you can enquire about the option to make a presentation to the full team, remembering to stress that you can “train” them on Ireland as a destination, as well as your region (and of course your product/ service!). This will strengthen the appeal and benefit for them.

Conducting successful sales meetings with B2B prospects or existing partners

In any sales situation, but especially in tourism sales, a consultative approach is vital. If you can fully understand the buyer’s needs and then show them how you plan to fulfil those needs with a customised solution, you have the start of a beautiful relationship!

The Six Steps to enhance your sales skills and strengthen your consultative selling approach

Step 1: Research

Before initiating contact with potential new customers, or planning your annual meeting to an existing partner, it’s crucial that you schedule enough time to research them and their business. The right research means that you become an “expert” in their business and are far better placed to answer any questions they may ask.

You should also have a full and in-depth understanding of your own business.

- Have you pre-prepared a mental list of your Unique Selling Points (USP)?
- Have you gone through your pricing strategy so you know your breakeven, bulk purchase points, booking confirmation deadlines and late cancellation clauses?
- Have you considered any potential objectives and pre-prepared responses to them?

In-depth research means that you can confidently enter the conversation with every possible answer at the ready. If they are an existing B2B partner, do you know exactly the volume and revenues they have/are generating to you and noted any changes in patterns from previous years in average spend, mix of business, or timing of business such as dates/days of seasonality etc.

You need to be able to demonstrate insights about their business coming to you, from their perspective and be prepared to offer suggestions as to how you can better service this. It also provides you with an opportunity to thank them knowledgably, for business placed with you. However, if in the case that their business volume and revenues have dropped off in the recent past, or they are seeking more/higher demand days of the week, it leaves you better informed to renegotiate the terms of your partnership/contract.

For example, you may not be able sustain the volume discounts you had offered in the past based on reduced volume or equally in the case of accommodations, you may no longer be able to offer room allocations in the way you did previously but may want to re-negotiate an X % discount on the BAR rate with them, based on availability, or have a tiered rate system for high demand event periods or specific days of the week, while possibly offering greater commissions on other lower demand dates/days to influence/stimulate them to better spread the business.

Step 2: Ask

Asking may sound simple, but:

- Are you asking the right questions?
- In the right order?
- In the right way?

For many of us in sales situations we jump straight in and start "telling". But to build a long term relationship, we need to start asking. Only by asking the right questions can we find out what exactly they want for their business, and how we can help them to fulfil it.

TOP TIP

Start with open-ended questions to 'temperature check' the business mood, booking and consumer trends that may be relevant to how you steer your meeting

Start by asking broad open questions like "What's the season looking like for you or how are future bookings looking like for Europe and Ireland?"… " Have you been noting any changes in the way customers are booking or what they are looking for from their holiday to Ireland?" before drilling down into specific, closed questions like "Would a Sunday or a Tuesday arrival suit you better?"

These open questions are often very telling as to how the buyer sentiment about business to Ireland is and may prompt you to present specific news about your offering, local area services or experiences that can generate a freshness or excitement about placing new or repeat business with you.

Step 3: Listen (actively)

The better you are at asking great questions, the less you will need to say, and the more actively you will be able to listen. You need to truly listen, with the purpose of understanding and absorbing what is being said (and what is not being said).

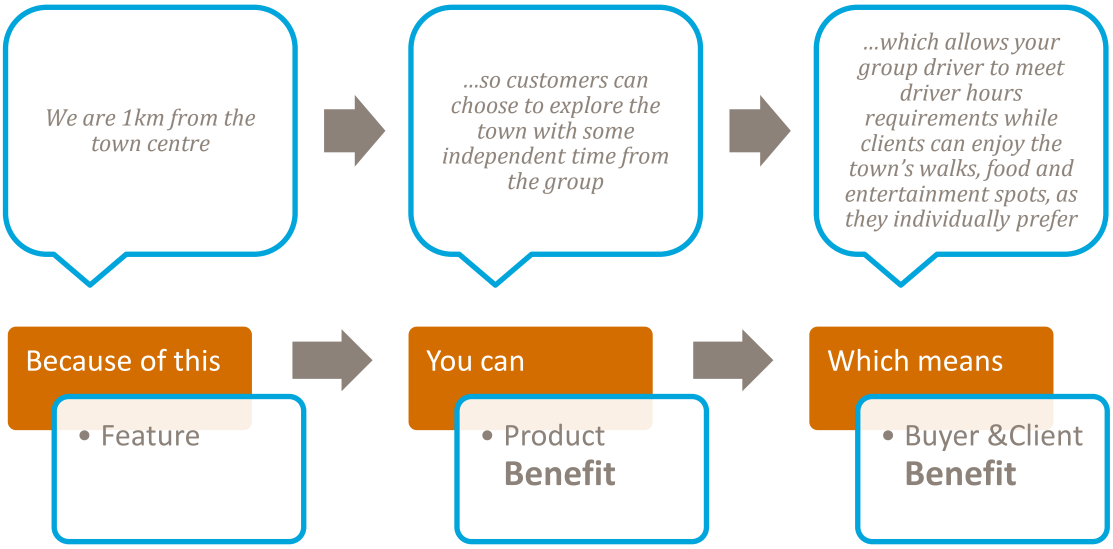
It is a basic human need to want to be heard. So by showing the customer that you are actively listening, you will quickly build trust and rapport. Make sure you don't interrupt, but simply guide them through the discussion with clarifying questions like "how do you mean". Take notes, certainly… this makes you look more attentive, and gives you a reference for follow up. Periodically paraphrase what the buyer said. For example: "If I'm understanding correctly, you're saying …" and then pause, waiting for them to talk further.

Most people are just asking for their turn to speak! So if you practise and perfect the art of active listening, you will see your sales ratios and business relationships improve.

Step 4: Tell them what is in it for them!

Most of us know the key features of our products and service and can reel them off as needed. But unless we "translate" each feature into the specific benefits that the person in front of us wants… we're missing a trick!

You can only do this fully if you've actively listened and have noted (either mentally or on paper) their key needs, challenges and 'hot buttons' they value most.



Step 5: Summarise what's agreed and confirm timelines for actions

It's always useful at the end of a meeting to recap on main actions agreed, next steps and also ensures both parties are on the same page in terms of expected delivery timelines. This may include items such as rewording of contacts, changes in contract clauses or signing and return of contracts, new group rates, new product news descriptors, new new visuals, confirmation of block bookings or allocations etc. It also helps bring a logical closure to a meeting and makes the follow up written communications easier and more efficient.

Step 6: Follow Up: Confirming the sale / Contract Agreement or Next Steps

When meeting with new potential distribution partners, you don't always "close the deal" the first time you meet. They may have to consult with their team, meet some other suppliers, or crunch the numbers in their own time. The key really is to ensure that you leave the meeting with some sort of commitment; a follow up phone call or meeting, a completed contract; or a commitment to at least seriously "think about it". Patience is key. Rushing a buyer can quickly end your relationship, if they feel hassled by you and put under pressure. If you asked great questions, actively listened as they talked and took good notes during the meeting, following through will be a matter of translating the information gathered into potential opportunities. Always follow up with an email thanking them for their time, outlining the key points covered and answering any queries that came up.

See further resources: *'The Dos and Don'ts of Sales Calls'; 'The Dos and Don'ts of Sales Missions/Sales Blitzes' and also further resources on how to get involved in sales missions.*