

# Understanding The Buying Process in Complex Sales

Buyers like salespeople use processes either consciously or subconsciously to achieve their outcomes.

The difference is:

- A sales process has five to seven stages depending on the type of product or service and is used to manage a sales opportunity from business development through to a close
- A buying process is a procedure organizations' go through to advance the purchase of a product or service.

Sales are lost when these two processes are misaligned. Sales strategies need to be implemented at each decision stage of the buying process to maximize influence and to progress the sales opportunity to the next stage.

## Five client decision stages:

### 1. Concealed

Quite frankly nothing happens if the client is not aware a problem exists, or they are not prepared to act and address the problem.

### 2. Awareness

When a client has identified a problem, their response to act will depend on whether it is a minor irritation they can live with, or a major issue creating an unacceptable cost or lost opportunity to the organization.

### 3. Analysis

A client will look at options available to them to solve the problem. This can include using internal resources, searching the internet for potential suppliers, or contacting colleagues who may have the answer or provide a recommendation.

During this stage your role is to:

- Uncover the selection criteria. Example: minimal risk, guarantee, customer support
- Increase the selection criteria if essential factors are missing that can also strengthen your proposal. Example: Warranty
- Highlight the close match between your product or service and the selection criteria.

A client will use their selection criteria to compare supplier proposals.

A perfect match between the selection criteria and the successful proposal is not likely. To win the business means having the closest match between the client's selection criteria and your proposal.

## Analysis stage oversights

- Not uncovering and or assuming the selection criteria
- Not expanding the selection criteria to create a closer match
- Not aligning the sales process to the decision stage.

#### **4. Decision**

A client will tend to go with the salesperson and company they know and trust, so if you have an existing relationship where trust and creditability has been established you will be in the best position to win the business.

Last-minute concerns are a reality and need to be openly discussed and quickly resolved. Hidden concerns during the decision stage is the main reason for lost sales.

#### **5. Evaluation**

This is post implementation, the client has experienced your company's product or service and assesses if it has met and or surpassed what was initially agreed.

At this stage of the buying process there are opportunities to grow the relationship and introduce new products or services. Strategically it is an ideal time to differentiate yourself from competitors to the extent the client only wants to deal with you and your company.

#### **Types of differentiators:**

##### **Tangible**

These need to solve a client's problem in a superior way compared to your competitors or their internal resources. A client can quickly and easily measure tangible differentiators and do so often when they need to make a quick decision. Example cost, return on investment.

##### **Intangible**

These can be difficult but not impossible to measure because intangible differentiators take time and effort to evaluate. Example: quality customer service, commitment.

Understanding a client's buying process is vital. It allows you to adapt every sales meeting according to their decision stage. The outcomes are you will be set apart from competitors and win the business.

There is considerably more to aligning sales and buying processes than briefly outlined in this article. If you have any questions feel free to contact me directly.



Kurt is a sales practitioner who created sales records in five industries and won major sales awards including Salesperson of the Year. The products and services he sold were newly released, consultative, relationship and retail. He is a recognized sales expert, successful author and respected sales and personal development coach who has guided organizations and salespeople to vastly improved sales performance and profitability. His clients range from small to multinational companies in Australia, the Middle East, Asia, and Europe.

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