

ELECTION PROVIDES INSIGHTS TO MORE EFFECTIVE CAR SELLING

Technology Alone Isn't the Holy Grail

Donald Trump's election proves that state-of-the-art technology, by itself, doesn't provide all the answers. Based on the vote totals, the highly sophisticated, technology-driven polls missed the mark.

In that same vein, relying on technology alone to sell cars isn't the Holy Grail that some make it out to be.

With all its bells and whistles, technology can be undone by people who deliberately distort their answers, provide incomplete/inaccurate information, or change their minds.

Case in point: a dealer's data mining shows that a prospect wants a red crossover SUV, and details the supposed preferences about everything from color to desired storage capacity. Acting on this profile, the sales specialist steers the prospect toward SUV crossovers on the floor.

Suddenly, the would-be buyer bolts toward a fire-engine red two-seater convertible on the showroom floor, and wants to test drive it. We see it every day. What they say they want and what they buy are sometimes two different things.

Ask away... then listen.

Human decision-making is complicated, prone to whimsy and spontaneity, and can be influenced by factors that no technology-driven profiling will uncover. That said, what does it take to help ensure the sale - no matter what has gone before?

A key part of getting to clarity in terms of helping a prospect is listening very closely to how the answers are phrased, tone of voice, and emotions being conveyed.

Good questioning, listening skills and intuition all contribute. Properly done, this will both confirm what the prospect says he prefers and compare it to other feedback that might dictate a different recommendation. (Trump is credited with intuition and listening skills that told him what his audience wanted, and how to respond to "close the sale.")

For example, the prospect may "prefer" an SUV crossover because of its practicality and sustainability for a growing family. But there's another voice screaming for the excitement and freedom of having that hot sports car. A savvy salesperson will then throw out the technologically-driven "personal playbook" and become a good investigative reporter.

Questions can be along the lines of:

1. What pressures have moved you in the direction of this SUV?
2. How many of those pressures exist because of the need to satisfy other people (e.g., family)?
3. If you were just buying for yourself, what direction would you go?
4. Is this vehicle going to be a primary family car or serve as a backup, impacting reliance on it for multiple-person transportation?
5. How often do you need to haul goods? What types and volumes of goods do you haul?
6. Are you more interested in the car as dependable transportation, traveling or thrill-seeking?
7. How big a factor is safety?

8. How big a factor is MPG?
9. How big a factor is fast acceleration and overall power?
10. How big a factor is economy of ongoing maintenance?

Obviously, these are just some basics. The key is to get a clearer idea of what the prospect's priorities are, then confirm budget, assemble them into recommendations, and see what solutions you can provide to meet the needs and wants.

Take into account both verbal and non-verbal clues.

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It's also critical to watch body language. A prospect displaying openness and overt acceptance or guarded response and hesitation can be seen in basic body language gestures.

To some of us old school car guys, all of this may sound elementary - because that's how we came up through the business, before there were all the advanced ways to "figure out" prospects before they entered a showroom floor.

Today, between order-takers who just answer questions without asking any of their own, and "know-it-alls" who presume to know their prospects' total picture based on a digital profile asking confirming questions, these are highly important skills.

Get creative with solutions. Once the salesperson has as full a picture as possible, provide ideas that can range from conventional to way out of the box. It may require looking beyond the obvious, including present inventory, to find answers that will resonate with a would-be buyer.

In the example above, let's say the salesperson determines the prospect really wants the sports car but is resigned to the more practical SUV crossover. Based on the intelligence gathered, the SUV meets most of the needs/preferences. But, what he really yearns for is the excitement of the convertible sports car that can go 0-60 in under four seconds.

It's easy enough to stop with the SUV. After all, it's the better objective solution for the circumstances at hand. But, as we all know, car buying is also about the emotional thrill of adventure, open air, high speed,

and whatever appeals to that prospect.

Why not wrap practicality and performance in a creatively structured "two-car deal?" Find a used SUV crossover that meets the practical needs, and then move on to a sports car (likely older and lower-priced) for the "want" side of things. While two-car deals can be tricky, weigh all the options in the direction that suits your buyer's ability, wants, and then needs, in that order.

Technology itself can fool salespeople into only one solution. As your deal ebbs and flows during the "landing stage," keep the ideas flowing in your head on how to best structure the deal that will work best based on abilities, wants, and needs.

If the deal doesn't necessarily work out with all your sales expertise, don't be afraid of a tried and true process, known as the T.O., or turnover. A T.O., or manager introduction, can help move the deal along while the prospect is still there. There may be other options a manager or even another salesperson can think of that you haven't. In any case, give the prospect a reason to return. Then follow up periodically when another option presents itself on the lot or a special deal can be offered based on other factors.

Capture the conversation on a database.

One area where technology can be extremely helpful is using a CRM, or other technology, and using it consistently. Get in the habit of recording information immediately after your contact's visit, call, or email. A CRM is only as good as the information going in.

If you prefer writing things down, the secret is in the consistency - even if it's a 3x5 card. Combining this with post-visit intel can make a powerful follow-up, and creates more customers for life.

Moral of this story: Salespeople who rely too much on technology and not enough on good interviewing skills and instincts will find themselves losing sales they could have won. ☞



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