



I was involved with a proposal to an organization that we hoped would become a very significant new client. A lot of time and energy had been invested in writing a professional looking proposal. As I read the draft document I could appreciate the effort that it must have taken. A good overview of our company was given, followed by a comprehensive description of our proposed products and services. The document read well. However I was worried that it lacked a certain amount of selling punch.

I then recalled an old trick I learned earlier in my career. At the end of every paragraph I'd take a red pen and write "so what?" and then see if the document, statement, paragraph, etc. could answer that question from the prospect's perspective.

If you have written something like:

"Our company was founded in 1974 and now employs 35,500 in 16 centers across the country. We service over 1,000 clients from 26 world-class service centers. In 1999 we became ISO 9000 certified, and we won the Malcolm Baldrige Excellence award in 2001."

So what?



Exactly, so what? That last paragraph does not answer the question, regardless of the fact that the question wasn't asked. Assume that your prospects are going to ask it themselves, even if only subconsciously. Try this - often a good bridge from one of these open-ended paragraphs or statements starts with "What this means to you is..." or "Because of this...", or refer back to issues or concerns that the prospect has made you aware of. Now, let's answer "so what?" from the prospect's perspective. This may include such things as:

- "What this means to you is that we have the proven ability to provide you with the service you need to ensure that your plants are kept running 24 by 7."
- "Because of this we can provide a consistently high level of reliable service to you at each of your locations across the country."
- "You stated in your RFP that service was a major concern, and our proven track record demonstrates that you can rely on us to meet - or exceed - your exacting service requirements."

Whatever it may be, we must specifically reply to "so what?" for every statement we make. We cannot rely on the prospect to read our great claims, then immediately and automatically translate them into what it means for them.

This great two-word test not only works for the written word, but also the spoken word. I have found it a great test to apply to a presentation. Take a look at your slides and see if you are indeed answering "so what?" for each point that you intend to make.

And, as you put together your answers to "so what?" ask yourself the following: Does it answer it clearly? Does the answer refer directly back to the statements or claims you've just made? Does the answer closely relate to what you know about your prospect's specific needs?

Every time you write, present, or speak to your prospect, make sure you can answer the question "*so what?*" - clearly, directly, and from the prospect's perspective.

From Martyn Lewis' upcoming book "Sales Wise - an anthology of selling stories, follies, and fables", each with a *relevant* and *timely* sales message. To be published later in 2003. If you wish to be notified of publication date please email us at saleswise@market-partners.com