



The Corporate Pitch & Toss

by
Martyn Lewis

Several years ago I was involved in a very important strategic selling situation. A large IBM customer was considering a new technology platform and the opportunity of un-winding a Big Blue system beckoned. Intoxicating, to say the least. IBM clearly had the inside track but I had an ace up my sleeve – the insider. Jim was a senior executive, part of the evaluation team and was also a close friend of a close friend. We moved in the same social circles, often dined together, and had visited each other's homes with our wives. Over time, Jim had become an invaluable inside coach for me.

After several months of intense selling efforts - RFP's, evaluations, presentations, proposals, and all the other various and sundry activities that give salespeople gray hair, ulcers, and great golf swings – we were short-listed with two other suppliers including the incumbent IBM. The client then told us that they would dedicate a full day to meeting with each of the potential suppliers, and that a decision would follow shortly thereafter.

Finally! Exactly what I was looking for: face-to-face, one-on-one, and we would have our corporate guns locked and loaded with valuable and relevant information! With Jim's help, I was able to fully understand what they were looking for and what was important to them. I also understood what they did, and didn't, like about the other two finalists and had comprehensive profiles of each of the executive team members that would be attending the presentations.

The contract was worth several million, would clinch our budgets for the quarter, plus a major bonus – the badge of honor for knocking out IBM. In those days that was a very bright and shiny decoration indeed! It could very well be our day in the sun, so we set to work.

Imagine the time and effort we put into preparing the presentation – we flew in industry gurus, application specialists, and technology experts from across North America. We designed a multi-media extravaganza for our state-of-the-art Customer Presentation



Center that was worthy of a Broadway production. We even ran a full dress rehearsal the day before the big show. Along with the optics and the “sizzle”, we also had substance on our side. We knew what the customer was thinking; we knew what the customer wanted. We couldn’t have been better prepared.

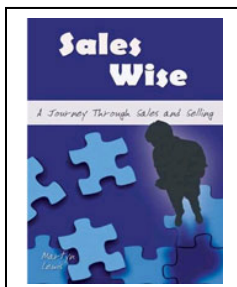
The big day arrived and it went off flawlessly. We shared our understanding of their business challenges, discussed and demonstrated how our technology would provide them with a competitive advantage, and discreetly informed where we were better than the competitors. When we were done, there were warm handshakes all round and they thanked us sincerely for a very productive day. The evening ended with me buying dinner for our team that justly believed they had done a great job – and they had!

As we were the last prospective vendor to present, I had arranged cocktails with Jim the next evening. We met and, of course, I was readily anticipating his feedback. It was no surprise when he shared with me that his team had really enjoyed the day and believed that it was time well spent. He said that everyone fully realized the expertise we had demonstrated and believed our solutions would enable them to gain competitive advantage in their market place. At this stage, I was positively glowing and truly believed that it was only the rubber stamp standing between the contract and me. And then - the roof fell in!

What Jim said next absolutely floored me and has stayed with me for all of my selling years. He said “However, there really is very little difference between what you said and what the other two suppliers said. In fact, you are almost indistinguishable.” After my initial shock, he shared with me that there were far more similarities with the three finalists than differences – right down to the suits we were wearing and even the decor in our meeting rooms.

From this I learned a very valuable lesson – assume that your competition is just like you. Assume they understand the market and that they know the right words to say. Assume that their teams comprise equally dedicated and professional players as yours. Don’t think that you can differentiate based solely upon your products and approach. And, most importantly, don’t think that a prospect is going to sit through a corporate sales pitch and believe that you are clearly better than your competitors.

And, assume one more thing – they will probably be as bored with you as they were with everybody else!



**“Sales Wise – a Journey through Sales and Selling”
by Martyn Lewis**

is now available from Amazon.com.

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new ways of thinking about sales – and shows you how to sell
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