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Mackenzie Wright

Western Michigan University, mackenzie.m.wright@gmail.com

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Preparing and Executing an Effective Sales Call

By Mackenzie Wright
Bachelor of Business Administration
Sales and Business Marketing
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Abstract

This thesis is written in a business document format. It will have four main sections: Introduction, Preparation, Execution, and Conclusion. Each section will include subsections. I will be discussing my involvement in the International Collegiate Sales Competition (ICSC), which was my thesis project. I will be comparing my participation in the ICSC to the knowledge I gained during my tenure as a Sales and Business Marketing student in the Haworth College of Business.

Any data or information was taken from WMU's website, the ICSC website, and my knowledge from WMU sales classes.

Introduction

In early September 2015, I was selected from my sales program to compete in the International Collegiate Sales Competition. This competition was hosted by Florida State University and took place at the Rosen Plaza Hotel in Orlando. Sixty schools compete in the Sales Role Play competition, and each university selects two students to represent their university. This was the fourth year of the competition.

Sales and Business Marketing Program

The Sales and Business Marketing (SBM) program at Western Michigan University has a history of success at national sales competitions. Education Portal ranks our program No. 1 in the "Top U.S. Sales Schools." We have the No. 1 registered student organization in the Haworth College of Business, the Sales and Business Marketing Association. Approximately 90 percent of WMU's sales and business marketing students are employed at the time of graduation. More than 75 regional and national employers actively recruit our graduates, which is how I was connected to the company with which I will start my first job after college.

Our program has a history of success. The national sales competitions that we compete in are excellent training for real world sales. SBM students finished in the Top 10 seven years in a row and placed in the Top 5 five times at the National Collegiate Sales Competition. We also partner with companies to do in-house sales competitions among our program's members to further enhance and practice our skills. The International Collegiate Sales Competition is the newest that we've participated in and the largest. We have yet to place in the Top 10 at this competition, but we are hopeful that it will happen soon.

Audition Process

Going into my last semester of college, I wanted to make sure that I didn't leave Western Michigan University with regrets. When my professors sent out an email about auditioning for the three sales competitions that take place during the fall semester, I was interested but hesitant. Our program has a number of elite students, any of whom would be able to perform well in these competitions, and I doubted my abilities and decided not to sign up. However, during my first week of classes that semester, I was inspired by my classes to give it a shot. After all, what salesperson doesn't want to prove that she's the best? The competitiveness in me gave me the push to finally sign up the day before the auditions took place. Luckily, they had a spot available for me.

The audition consisted of speed selling for my professors. Another name for speed selling is an elevator speech. It's called this because you should be able to convey your message in

the amount of time it would take to ride an elevator with someone; the ideal time to shoot for is two minutes. Speed selling is an important skill that has been taught and practiced since the first selling class we take in the program. I had to sell my professors on why they should choose me to compete.

For the audition, I was in a room with one professor doing this while the others watched in the video room of the Harold Zeigler Sales Lab. After I gave my speed sell, I had to explain why I wanted to compete and which competition I would prefer. My reasoning was that I wanted to challenge myself, and I knew that competing for my school would be both a privilege and a great learning experience. I didn't care what competition I was picked for as long as I was chosen. I'm not sure how many students auditioned for a spot, but I was one of six selected from the sales program to represent Western in a national sales competition.

International Collegiate Sales Competition

For the competition, we were given different scenarios for each of the four rounds. Our focus for preparation was on the first two rounds because without moving forward in these, we wouldn't even have the chance to do well in the final round. Our scenarios involved us being sales representatives for a company called SalonBiz, which is owned by Neill-TSP. Neill-TSP is a company that owns the Aveda Institutions for hair styling, and they distribute Aveda products through those salons. SalonBiz is a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software that is cloud-based and allows salons to have all of their data in one location.

For the first round of competition, we were given 15 minutes to complete the call. For the other rounds, we were given 20 minutes. A typical sales call would last around 30 minutes, so the pressure was on to be efficient and effective with time management.

Preparation

The 3 P's of Selling

The three P's of selling are Persistence, Preparation, and Purposeful. Persistence is consistently dedicating energy and resources to achieving a goal until that goal is achieved. Preparation allows you to know more, do more, and achieve more. Purposeful is consciously using intellect, learning, and experience to guide your actions. We used these 3 P's during our prep and practice for the competition.

5-30-5 Battle

The 5-30-5 Battle is what you do when making appointment setting phone calls. You have five seconds to connect with them as a person, thirty seconds to connect on a business

level, and five minutes to sell them on an appointment. These phone calls can be difficult to make, so it's important not to sell them on the product or service and focus on the appointment. No one likes getting interrupted when they're busy, so being able to win the 5-30-5 Battle is going to be key if you want to eventually make a sale.

For the ICSC, we didn't have to make appointment setting phone calls. The role plays are set up as the initial meeting after this type of call would be made, so even though it wasn't a part of the competition, it would still be a part of the total sales process.

Repertoire of Good Questions

One of the most important things that a salesperson needs is a repertoire of good questions. Selling isn't convincing someone to buy your product or service regardless of whether he needs it. It's a relationship process that hopefully ends in mutual benefit, but one of the first parts of that process is figuring out whether there is a *need* for the product or service.

One of the first things that my professor, partner, and I did when we started preparing for the competition was come up with a bunch of possible questions to ask our client. We wanted to have both directive and receptive questions, as well as a couple that were mixed. Directive questions are questions that have straightforward or yes/no answers. For example, asking the number of employees a buyer has or confirming a previously stated number would be directive. Receptive questions are questions that have more open-ended answers. Asking what current problems a buyer is having with their Customer Relationship Management software would be receptive.

Competition Compared to Real Call

For a typical sales call, you'd use the 1-to-1 rule for preparation. This means for every minute you'll be in the sales call, you want to prepare for at least that amount of time. For example, if you scheduled a 30-minute sales call, you would prepare at least 30 minutes for that call. It also works for phone calls; for a five-minute phone call, prepare for at least five minutes.

During our preparation for the ICSC, my professor, partner, and I met for a couple of hours at least a couple times a week prior to the competition. In total, we prepared and practiced for at least 30 hours for the competition.

Execution

The Sales Process

My professors did an excellent job of teaching us the sales process and not a script that we should memorize when going into a call. The sales process allows us to be adaptive to each unique situation because there is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to people and their needs. There are five steps to the sales process: Opening, Needs Identification, Presentation, Answering Questions, and Gaining Commitment. This process was the foundation of our role play.

Opening consists of using the CLAP model. CLAP stands for Connect, Logistics, Agenda, and Permission. First, you connect with the client as a person to start the meeting. You can bring up something you talked about in your last conversation. For example, if you know that they're a fan of a certain sports team, make sure you know how the last game went. Connecting to the client helps sets the tone for the whole meeting and will hopefully build good rapport. Logistics involve checking that you still have the same amount of time you agreed upon for the meeting and asking if anyone else will be joining the meeting before getting started. Agenda is going over, step by step, with the client what you are planning to accomplish during the meeting. Finally, you ask permission to get started.

Needs Identification is the part of the sales process where you uncover issues that are important to the prospect, thoroughly understand and confirm these issues and objectives, and assess the relative importance of each issue. This section is where you would use the repertoire of good questions mentioned in the Preparation section. Until you understand what the prospect is looking for and what is most important to him, you won't be able to efficiently solve these issues.

Presentation is often considered the centerpiece of the sales call. After the Needs ID section, you hopefully have a good grasp on what the prospect is looking for and how you can help. During this section, you present an overview of recommended products/services and address the specific buyer needs that you just discovered. After you've done this, you want to do a trial close; it's important to see where the buyer is at currently in the call.

It's at this point where you will answer most of the questions that the buyer has. Doing a trial close will bring up concerns that the buyer has about your product or service. It is here that you will be handling objections, which will be discussed in the next subsection.

Finally, after you address the prospect's concerns and have gone over the rest of the steps in the sales process, it's time to officially go for the close. This part is never easy, but if

you've determined significant needs/issues that the buyer has and shown how you can address these issues, closing becomes easier because it's seen as the next logical step.

Overcoming Objections

Objections are a salesperson's best friend. The way to handle objections properly is to use the C-R-C model: Clarify, Respond, Confirm. Clarify the objection first to make sure that you understand the client's concern. Respond to the objection with knowledge to put the client at ease. Confirm that you answered the client's question and alleviated his concern. Until you have done those three things, don't assume that the potential customer is satisfied.

Competition Compared to Real Call

Participating in each round was similar to being in the sales lab at school for my finals except with a lot more pressure to succeed. I have never been more nervous in my life than I was standing before the door to go in and start the round. Regular sales calls shouldn't be as rigidly structured as the format for the rounds in the ICSC. There is a rubric that the judges score you on, and if you go out of order, it could mess up your final score. In a real sales call, it is better to be flexible with what the buyer wants to do. If they lead in a different direction than you had originally planned, that's okay because you have the foundation of the sales process that allows you to be adaptive.

Conclusion

Positives

Because of my participation in the competition, I have seen significant growth in my confidence as a salesperson. Our finals for our sales classes are sales calls, and after my experience with the ICSC, I was more comfortable with that situation which allowed me to think more clearly and be more adaptive in unexpected situations. I placed 1st in the first round of competition, and I narrowly missed going to the third round by coming in 2nd in the second round. I was disappointed, but I was still proud of myself for getting so close. Overall, I placed 13th out of 120 students who participated in the competition.

Round 1A Results								
	234	238	242	253	254	257	258	261
1st	John Johnston1	James Austin	Jessica Prescott	Courtney Showalter	Zachary Steinert	Katie Was	Shannon Morrow	Mackenzie Wright
2nd	Celia Bennett	Greg Howard	Shadya Duenas	Carla Sanchez	Cassie Rodriguez	Jason Raofpur	Brittany LeBahn	Max Adams1
3rd	Aaron Matthis	Jordan Lax	Ben Stipes	Andrew Ghazali	Grace Durbak	Matthew Rickey	Christina Cook1	Allison Yoakam
4th	Moses Jenkins	Alexander Ferko	Emily Cunard	Thomas West	Ernest Stevens	Ally Otto	Aisling O'Leary	Madison Loudermil
5th	Carrie Strickland	Jason Griffin	Kristin James	Jordan Byrd	Zach Schmitt		Jared Dey	Nathaniel LaBelle

(Round 1 Results taken from ICSC website)

Round 2A						
	ROOM 234	ROOM 238	ROOM 242	ROOM 253	ROOM 254	ROOM 257
1	Maura Kranzel	Max Adams1	Brittany LeBahn	Colin Adams2	Katie Was	Shannon Morrow
2	Drew Kelly	Eliiahu Vann	Mackenzie Wright	Emily Cunard	Jason Raofpur	Ashley Powell
3	Nicholas Cruz	Ari Lashkari	Jonathan Glende	Zeke Brown	Christopher LaFevers	Ryan Buske
4	Moses Jenkins	Jamie Nguyen	Andrew Ghazaii	Bobby Campbell	Morgan Labarbera	Cassie Rodriguez
5	Paul Dorf	Ginette Soper	Zachary Steinert	Stephenson Swan	Allison Yoakam	Nicholas Kremchek

(Round 2 Results taken from ICSC website)

Negatives

During the 2nd round of the competition, my buyer did something that I wasn't expecting, and instead of sticking to the foundation of the sales process, I let it fluster me and changed what I was planning on doing. I believe that if I had taken a breath and trusted myself more, I would have still executed properly and likely would have gone on to the next round. However, this is a good learning experience because I'll know what to do in the future if I'm ever flustered again.

Overall

The entire experience of preparing and competing in the competition is something that I'll value forever. I'm thankful for the opportunity to build a stronger connection and relationship with my professor, Dr. Steve Newell, who coached me as well as my peer, Christina Cook, who competed in the competition as well. It's an experience that I hope future sales students will continue to take advantage of. Being able to represent a school that I love and am so proud of graduating from is an honor and a privilege that I didn't take lightly. I wish I could have brought home another plaque or trophy for us to display, but I know that we will have success at the ICSC eventually if we keep working hard and challenging ourselves. I hope WMU and the SBM program continue participating in national sales competitions because they are an invaluable learning experience.