



BUYLAWS

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How can sales representatives increase their success rate when calling on buyers? By understanding their pressures and priorities, for one thing. Here's an insider's view.

DURING A TYPICAL DAY AN INDUSTRIAL BUYER HAS MEETINGS TO ATTEND, paperwork to process, negotiations to conduct, problems and disputes to resolve and, of course, phone calls to deal with, both internal and external. Calls they make to vendors can involve issues concerning delivery, invoicing, negotiations, and scheduling meetings, just to name a few topics. Potential new vendors trying to establish contact with them will find it challenging to get through to a buyer and speak for a few minutes about his or her product or services. Buyers—or their voicemail systems, quite often—get so many calls in the course of doing business that there simply isn't enough time for all of them to be returned. Understanding the pressures and constraints that most industrial buyers are dealing with will make you a more effective and empathetic vendor. Here are a few sample situations.

The sales rep may have a product or service that the buyer needs to know about, but getting through to a buyer can be a matter of timing, or even pure luck. The important thing is for the sales rep to understand that an unscheduled call may intrude on important business activities, and that a lack of time doesn't necessarily mean a lack of interest.

Another point involves whether there is a history of business between the two companies. If the history has been good for both, the buyer will be more likely to take the call or return it. There are many instances of companies doing business with each other for many years, and good relationships have developed as a result.

A third scenario could be when a new project or requirement has been sent out for bid by the buyer. Many times there are conversations regarding clarification of specifications, payment terms, warranty issues, lead times, etc. If a sales rep tries to contact a buyer concerning a project that is being bid, the buyer will probably want to have the conversation in order to receive a valid quotation.

Resolving problems is another reason why a buyer would talk to a sales rep. Whether it is an issue about pricing or invoicing, delivery or warranty, etc., both the buyer and the seller need to reach resolution. If such a situation exists, the buyer should speak with his or her counterpart to clear up the issue.

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These examples outline a few of the scenarios where a sales rep can expect to speak to a buyer. If there is a positive history between the two companies, chances are very good that a buyer will take the call or return it. If there is no history, the buyer may not, so the sales rep must be persistent. There is no secret technique or approach to contacting buyers, but there are three things that the sales rep should do to improve the chances of a return call.

First, preparation is paramount. Do some research about the customer. Many industrial firms have Web sites that can yield lots of valuable information, such as the buyer's name and contact information. There will be promotional information about the customer's product or service. This is very important and can be useful when the sales rep is working on his or her initial sales pitch.

Second, there are well-known databases such as ThomasNet that can provide additional product/service information about a customer's business. This type of data can be very worthwhile in making sales calls and presentations to customers.

Third, persistence is critical. Do not expect an order or even a return phone call after the first

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contact or attempt. Developing new business takes time, requires lots of hard work, and patience. In some cases, years can pass before getting that first order. In others, the time may not be so lengthy.

In summary, buyers do call back for specific reasons. In many instances, their reason for calling may be to resolve issues or problems, to negotiate, or some other reason. These calls are often situation-specific, and the sales rep should be prepared to respond accordingly. When making the initial call, though, the sales rep needs to be prepared and to be persistent. 📞