

Nine Ways to Build Trust and Win the Sale

by Dr. Dennis Rosen

What are you doing to build trust in the mind of your customers? Building trust is one of the best ways to increase sales of product and services. This is particularly true if you are selling professional services such as insurance, financial management, accounting or legal services, or selling business to business. Basically, success in these fields requires that you sell yourself to sell your products. And selling yourself involves development of customer trust in you as an individual and in your recommendations.

All sales people can talk about how good their company is, their client list and provide references. Despite such information including any hard data on performance, what is likely to separate one out from the others in the customer's mind is an emotional feeling that the customer has—a feeling of trust and “like” for the person trying to make the sale.

Trust can also win over the customer when you can't offer the lowest price. In such cases, sales people are routinely taught to sell value. But value cannot always be quantified. It often boils down to such statements as: “We provide better service.” “We'll be there when you need us.” “We'll work harder for you.” How can the customer know that this will really happen? They can't. In effect, we are asking them to put their trust in us. Without trust, the statements become meaningless.

Take Action to Boost Your Trust Quotient

Building trust quickly takes more than simple statements (trust me on this). It requires actions and statements *specifically designed* to grow a feeling of trust—trust that we deserve, but trust that we must work to earn. Here are nine specific ways that you can increase your customer's perception of trust in you:

- **Be dependable.** This is perhaps the most important action you can take. If you say you will do something, do it! Your dependability in action will have a significant effect on your customer's perceptions of, and trust in you.
- **Be specific.** Use specific deadlines in what you say and do to increase the perception of dependability and trust. For example, don't say, “I'll get back to you on that.” Say, “I'll get back to you before 2:00 tomorrow on that. Then, when you call back before your self-imposed deadline, emphasize your dependability by saying, “I said I'd get back to you before 2:00 on that issue, so I wanted to let you know. . .”
- **Use variety.** Find ways to demonstrate your dependability in various situations, across a variety of issues or areas (important and unimportant), over time and across people to build a consensus (for when your customer talks to your other customers).
- **Do the unexpected.** Customers often wonder whether we really mean what we say or we are just playing a role. When we say or do something unexpected (not common for someone in our role), it is interpreted as reflecting our true feelings. This helps all of our actions become more trusted. Unexpected actions might include sending a thank-you note, a gift, congratulating the customer during a special occasion, providing useful information that does not directly relate to the sale or performing some thoughtful action that is not clearly to your benefit and, thus, not normally expected.

- **Mention negatives.** Carefully selected negatives concerning your product or service can be mentioned. This is related to the above concept, since mentioning negatives is not expected and increases perception of trust. Naturally, anything negative that is pointed out should be something that is relatively minor and easily offset by positive features.
- **Share secrets.** (“Can I tell you a secret?” “Most people don’t know this, but...”). Trusted friends share secrets. The “secrets” your provide, of course, should be things that can be shared with the customer but, perhaps, are not common knowledge.
- **Point out your similarities to the customer.** People tend to trust others who are similar to themselves. This could include similarities in age, education, family, acquaintances, pets, hobbies, birthplaces, experiences, concerns, preferences, etc.
- **Find a common enemy.** As you talk with the customer, find dislikes you have in common. This could involve a person (e.g., a politician), a thing (e.g., wind chimes) or an idea (“I agree. I can’t stand people who won’t recycle”).
- **Use self-deprecating humor.** People tend to be more trusting of people who show they are human. We all have problems with weight or hair loss or home projects that don’t go as planned that can be casually mentioned. Just don’t over do it. It is important to maintain your image of professionalism.

In the end, it is your overall performance once you get the sale that will build strong trust in you. However, the above actions can help you get past the threshold of trust needed to get your foot in the door and demonstrate your and your product’s capabilities.

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