

How Many Cs are in Selling?

Possibly you feel that there are no Cs in selling, but, you'd be mistaken. There are many Cs in selling that may even surprise the grammar school teacher.

The 5 Cs of selling which every person should be aware of are: the customer, the competition, customizing the offer, the close and continuation. Let's take each element and expand on its significance.

Customer: This is an obvious element of the selling process but most individuals would not list it first. However, it needs to be the primary focus of your attention. Otherwise, your selling efforts will be poorly focused and not at all successful. Determine what the customer's needs are and how they have been met in the past. Determine how your offering will be superior to that. Also, don't exclude the specific needs of the individual making the purchasing decision. Often sales people will think of the customer as the organization - the corporate identify whose name is on the purchasing order. You need to remember that individuals make the decisions on behalf of the larger organization. In order to sell to the organization you need to determine what the identified decision maker puts a higher priority on: timely service, price, quality, delivery, etc. All of the elements are important but the reason the purchaser wants to talk with you may be because the existing provider has fallen short on a particular issue.

Competition: You need to know as much about your competition as possible. Know the competition's strengths and weaknesses. Many companies do a strengths and weakness analysis during their own planning process but not many companies do the same on each of their competitors. By knowing the weaknesses of your competition you strengthen your selling position. Also, ask the prospect about the competition. You may be surprised by the candid response you receive. Without asking you will only agonize over how best to promote your product. By asking questions you open up the process so the prospect feels more comfortable asking questions of you as well. One way to identify the key issues the prospect is wrestling with is to make it comfortable for them to ask questions.

Customize: Don't present a cookie-cutter solution to the prospect's problems. Customize the offer so that it meets the complete needs of the prospect. Go over your discussions with the prospect and review your package as to how it addressed each of their points of concern. Price is only one aspect; proven service, documented customer satisfaction with testimonial letters, and on-going commitments of support are other factors that can make a customized presentation the winner.

If in doubt, give the prospect a choice of alternatives so they can choose the one that best suites their needs. This provides them with the best solution and enables them to become part of the solution-design process. This also encourages the prospect to comment on why a certain option is better than the alternative.

Close: Although this may have been thought of as the primary "C" word in the sales process, it is only a factor once the previous steps mentioned have been properly conducted. The close is not "the slam them up against the wall and demand the order form to be signed" stereotype situation. Nor is it leaving the order form in the presentation folder and referring to it for the prospect to review and act upon. The most effective close process involves reviewing all the factors of the offer, reaching agreement on the best choice of options and answering any ancillary questions, and reaching agreement on how the

business relationship will proceed. The signing of the contract then becomes formality to solving the prospect's needs.

Continuing the process: Too often the sales person feels that once the sale is made one's energies need to be refocused on the next prospect to run down the next sale. The best opportunities are with your current customers. And the new customer you just acquired is part of that universe. Ensure your promises are kept, the new customer's expectations are met and inquire as to their further needs. You have spent your time developing a positive relationship that will be profitable over time. Now leverage this investment and aim for multiple sales for each and every one of your customers. Further, by doing a great job you will get referrals.

Mastering the 5 Cs of selling differentiates you from the “me-too” provider. In addition, your creative approach binds you to the customer so you make the initial sale and also maintain a long-term selling relationship that generates higher profits over time.

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