Solution Selling

Idea In Short

Solution Selling is a customer-centric sales methodology that focuses on understanding and solving the customer's problems by offering a customized solution. It involves a series of steps, including qualifying the opportunity, discovering the customer's needs, presenting a tailored solution, overcoming objections, closing the sale, and implementing the solution.

Solution Selling is a customer-centric sales methodology that has proven successful since the 1970s. This methodology focuses on understanding and solving the customer's problems by offering a customized solution. The approach hinges on recommending specific products or services that will make the prospect feel like their problems will disappear. Often this means that sellers are tailoring their offers to be bundles of different products and services for a truly custom solution.

The approach is based on the idea that customers are more likely to buy from a salesperson who can offer a solution to their problems rather than just selling a product or service. Solution Selling is a complex process that requires a deep understanding of the customer's needs, challenges, and goals. The salesperson needs to be able to build a relationship of trust with the customer, ask the right questions, and listen actively to understand the customer's perspective. The salesperson then needs to use this information to create a customized solution that addresses the customer's specific needs.

Solution Selling

Solution selling is a sales methodology in which a salesperson diagnoses a prospect's problem and offers specific and often custom solutions that will meet their unique needs.

Right off the bat, it's important to note that although the approach does require sales persons to offer buyers solutions, the premise of the methodology is much "bigger picture" than those solutions' price, features, and specs.

The "solution" component of solution selling refers to meeting the customer's underlying needs and solving large-scale business issues through customized bundles or packages of highly tailored or adaptable products and services. It aims to sell the entire outcome of solving the problem — not just the logistical or technical aspects of it.

Origins

The solution selling approach was developed in 1975 by Frank Watts, but made popular (and eventually trademarked) a bit later by Xerox employee Michael Bosworth. Bosworth went on to write the first book on the topic in 1995, Solution Selling: Creating Buyers in Difficult Selling Markets. His book continues to be one of the most popular resources on the topic today.

The solution selling method is particularly effective for customers with unique or very complex business problems.It's great for scenarios in which more traditional sales methods just don't work because the prospect needs a bespoke bundle of specific products or services, or an otherwise high level of support.

Solution Selling vs. Consultative Selling

Many people conflate or confuse the ideas of solution selling and consultative selling. To be fair, that's not a bad comparison — the two have many similarities.

Both solution selling and consultative selling emphasize prospect over product. And, both position the seller as the industry expert who can help the buyer determine the best solution.

In fact, solution selling is often credited for creating the "roots" of consultative selling, as well as other well-known methodologies like SPIN Selling, RAIN Selling, and Customer Centric Selling.

But there are some differences between the two.Consultative Selling vs. Solution Selling Consultative selling differs from solution selling in that it does not prioritize a solution-based outcome for the prospect. That's not to say a consultative approach doesn't win deals — it, too, is a very effective approach for closing deals, with the right sales person, product, and prospect. But, at the end of the day, consultative selling emphasizes the relationship over the solution.

Solution selling, on the other hand, demands that reps have such an in-depth understanding of — and empathy toward — a prospect's problem that they can craft a truly one-of-a-kind solution that will literally make the problem disappear. The emphasis is wholly on solving the prospect's problem in as complete a manner as possible.

To be clear, it's important to emphasize that solution selling is not really about selling a particular product or meeting a certain quota of deals — nor should sellers robotically rattle off the specs and features of their various offers in sales meetings.

Solution selling is about helping the buyer envision the bigger picture of the solution: the holistic picture of what their life will look like when their problem is solved.

Pros and Cons

Just like with any sales methodology, there are pros and cons to the solution selling method. It may not, for example, be the most effective method for prospects who know exactly what their problem is, and exactly how to find a solution.

That said, many sales persons find that they're able to adapt many of the basic principles of solution selling to a wide variety of sales scenarios.

Let's take a look at some of the pros and cons of solution selling, and how to leverage them to use the approach most effectively.

Pros

One of the best things about solution selling is that it's an approach that leads with empathy. With over 75% of buyers reporting feeling misunderstood by B2B sellers, it's crucial that salespeople demonstrate that they are deeply in tune with and invested in the buyer's needs.Solution selling pros Part of what makes this method so empathetic is that it uses a tailored approach to the sales process. It's very buyer-friendly and offers prospects a high level of support throughout the buyer's journey.

This makes it a great strategy to use for markets in which prospects may not even be aware yet that they have a problem.

Solution selling is all about helping the buyer solve big-picture, intrinsic company problems that will help them scale for success. With your help — your solution — their business can be transformed. This creates extremely happy customers that bring long-term value to your business through high-value contracts and referrals.

Finally, solution selling can be used by just about any sales team that's willing to put in the time and effort. It's a fairly structured approach, and training and experience are all that are needed to become skilled.

Cons

Although there are upsides to its structure, the solution selling method can sometimes feel a bit "rigid" for salespeople who prefer more flexibility within sales conversations. Much of the process is based on a question and answer process, which can sometimes lead to conversations that feel a bit jilted, or like they're not flowing naturally.

It also requires more upfront prospect research than some other popular sales methodologies, which can be a turn-off for sellers who prefer a lot of face-to-face prospect interaction.

The nature of solution selling — presenting a custom solution for a very specific problem — can make it feel complex at times. Each deal is unique and requires a fresh and innovative approach, and many solutions are not simple.

Finally, some critics of solution selling argue that it's becoming increasingly obsolete as buyers become more and more self-aware about their business problems. Part of the effectiveness of solution selling is the process of sellers helping buyers pinpoint specific issues, so some argue that the method loses its appeal without that component.

Steps

The solution selling process generally follows these step:

1. Prospect
2. Qualify
3. Discover

4. Add Value
5. Present,
6. Handle Objections
7. Close
8. Implement

The Solution Selling methodology consists of a series of steps, including:

Prospect

The first step in Solution Selling is to research companies that currently (or may imminently) struggle with a problem that your product solves. Your ICP and buyer personas (more on these profiles in the next section) will help you determine which companies to target.

Qualify

Once you've identified companies that represent a good fit for your offer, he next step in Solution Selling is to qualify the opportunity. It's time to make contact and learn more about the decision-making unit [DMU]. Here is where sales persons need to ask very targeted questions to learn as much as they can about the problem the prospect is facing.

Identify whether the customer has a problem that can be solved by the salesperson's solution. This involves understanding the customer's business, their pain points, and the goals they are trying to achieve.

Discover

During the discovery stage, the seller's goal is to uncover the cause and the magnitude of the problem. Open-ended questions can help salespeople truly understand which pain points are hurting the most for the prospect and just how much of an impact they're having on the organization.

The salesperson needs to ask open-ended questions to discover the customer's needs, priorities, and challenges. This step is critical because it enables the salesperson to understand the customer's perspective and tailor the solution to meet their specific needs.

Salespeople should practice asking targeted questions to help them get to the heart of what

prospects really need during the discovery stage.

Add Value

After the sales person has a thorough understanding of the buyer's nuanced problem, it's time to educate.

Find a way to add value to the buyer's journey — often through content like case studies, whitepapers, or other educational material — and demonstrate how your solution will solve their problem.

Present

By this point, the seller should have a good sense of how much buy-in they have from the buyer. Assuming the prospect is eager to engage, the sales person can start to craft a custom solution.

Based on the information gathered during the discovery phase, the salesperson needs to present a customized solution that addresses the customer's needs and aligns with their goals. The solution needs to be presented in a way that highlights the value it will bring to the customer.

Whenever possible, try to present your offer directly to a decision maker. Show them specifically how your solution will erase their pain points and systematically tackle their business's challenges.

Highlight, if you can, how broad-reaching your solution will be: How many people will it affect? How many dollars will it save or generate? How much time can be gained back with your solution? Demonstrate tangible ROI.

Remember — sell a solution, not features or products.

Handle Objections

Even the most tailored solution may face objections from the customer. The salesperson needs to be prepared to address these objections by presenting evidence to support the solution's effectiveness and demonstrating how it meets the customer's needs.

Close

The last step of the process is to finalize the deal and agree on mutually beneficial terms.

Once the objections have been overcome, the salesperson needs to close the sale by gaining the customer's agreement to move forward with the solution. This involves finalizing the details of the proposal, including price, delivery, and implementation.

Implement

Once the sale has been closed, the salesperson needs to work with the customer to implement the solution. This includes coordinating with other departments, such as delivery and installation, and ensuring that the solution is implemented as smoothly as possible.

Part of what makes solution selling so popular is its framework — it's predictable and easy to follow. Just remember to be mindful of this as you practice the approach; the more natural you can make the conversation, the better.

Best Practices

Understand Your Product

Although solution selling is decidedly not about selling products, it's actually extremely important for salespeople to be head-to-toe familiar with their product or service and its features.

Though you shouldn't be listing these off in your sales meetings, you need to be able to quickly map the ways your product can meet the needs of the prospect so you can build a perfect solution package for them.

Along those same lines, it's also important that sales persons are clear and up-to-date about the sales content available to them. Sales and marketing should work together to create and maintain a content library, where sellers can access many types of sales collateral that can offer value in sales conversations.

Understand Your ICP and Buyer Personas

Just like salespeople need to be extremely familiar with their own product, they also need to know all of the details and nuances of their ideal customer profile [ICP] and buyer persona. Understanding your ICP and buyer personas will give you a great leg up when it comes to getting to know your prospect and the specifics of their unique problem.

Analyze Won Deals

Take a careful look at the data behind your most successful accounts. What do they have in common when it comes to demographics, firmographics, or technographics? How were they behaviorally similar during the sales process? At what point did they buy in?

All of this information will help salespeople refine and optimize their research, qualification, and discovery skills for future leads in the pipeline.

Develop Your Questions

One of the most important components of successful solution selling is creating and asking strategic, open-ended questions effectively.solution selling: open-ended vs. closed-ended questions Once you have a solid big-picture understanding of their problem and concerns, you can transition to more specific questions to understand the tangible impacts.

Practice Selling Value

Salespeople practicing solution selling need to be able to clearly communicate their products' ROI. Data and case studies can support your claims, but you should be able to highlight how life is easier with the help of your solution.

The seller's job is to persuade the buyer of two big things: a) that the solution can make the problem disappear forever, and b) that the buyer will see data-driven proof of that in their business metrics.

Solution Selling Questions

By nature of the approach, all solution selling sales conversations will be entirely unique. With that in mind, there isn't one specific script or set of questions that will be guaranteed effective for a majority of prospects.

That being said, there are several framework questions that can be tweaked and adapted to the specifics of each prospect and deal. Here are a few of the most commonly used:

- Describe the problem[s] you're facing. What would you say are its root causes?
- Are these challenges company-wide, or specific to a department or team?
- Is this an ongoing problem, or does it present at specific times?
- Can you quantify the impacts of the problem?
- How long has the problem been occurring? How or why did it get this far?
- Have you tried [possible solution]? What was the outcome?
- How has this problem impacted your workload, motivation, or focus?
- What does [decision maker] think about the problem?
- What goals do you have right now for your business? How about in the next 6 – 12 months?
- Would those goals be different if your problem no longer existed?
- What's holding you back from reaching your goals?
- How would implementing the solution affect your competitiveness in the market?
- What is forecasted to happen to your revenue numbers if you don't solve the problem?

All of these are great starting points for diagnosing a prospect's problem, qualifying them for a solution, and adding value to their deliberation throughout the sales process.

Because solution selling has been around for so long, there is ample research and resources available on the methodology.

Examples

Solution Selling has been used successfully in a wide range of industries, including technology, healthcare, and manufacturing. Here are some real-world examples of Solution Selling in action:

Technology Sales

A software company uses Solution Selling to sell its project management software to a large construction company. The salesperson starts by qualifying the opportunity, asking questions about the company's current project management processes and the challenges

they are facing. The salesperson then presents a tailored solution that includes the software, along with training and implementation services. The salesperson works with the construction company to overcome objections related to cost and implementation, and finally closes the sale. The software is successfully implemented, resulting in improved project management processes and increased efficiency.

Healthcare Sales

A medical device manufacturer uses Solution Selling to sell its diagnostic equipment to a hospital. The salesperson starts by qualifying the opportunity, asking questions about the hospital's current diagnostic equipment, the challenges they are facing, and the goals they are trying to achieve. The salesperson then presents a tailored solution that includes the diagnostic equipment, along with training and support services. The salesperson works with the hospital to overcome objections related to cost and implementation, and finally closes the sale. The equipment is successfully implemented, resulting in improved patient outcomes and increased efficiency.

Manufacturing Sales

A manufacturing company uses Solution Selling to sell its customized machinery to a large automotive company. The salesperson starts by qualifying the opportunity, asking questions about the automotive company's current manufacturing processes, the challenges they are facing, and the goals they are trying to achieve. The salesperson then presents a tailored solution that includes customized machinery that meets the automotive company's unique needs, along with installation and maintenance services.

The salesperson works with the automotive company to overcome objections related to the cost and the complexity of the installation process. The salesperson provides evidence of the effectiveness of the machinery and demonstrates how it will improve the automotive company's manufacturing processes, leading to increased efficiency and reduced costs in the long run. The salesperson finally closes the sale, and the customized machinery is successfully installed and implemented.

Advantages

One of the key advantages of the Solution Selling methodology is that it enables sales professionals to build a relationship of trust with the customer. By actively listening to the

customer and focusing on their specific needs, the salesperson can demonstrate that they are genuinely interested in helping the customer solve their problems rather than just selling a product or service.

Another advantage of the Solution Selling methodology is that it enables sales professionals to differentiate themselves from the competition. By presenting a customized solution that addresses the customer's specific needs and aligns with their goals, the salesperson can demonstrate the unique value that they can bring to the customer's business.

Shortcomings

However, the Solution Selling methodology is not without its challenges. It requires a deep understanding of the customer's business and a high degree of customization, which can be time-consuming and resource-intensive. Sales professionals also need to be skilled in overcoming objections and negotiating to close the sale.

Summary

Solution Selling has been used successfully in a wide range of industries, including technology, healthcare, and manufacturing. By building a relationship of trust with the customer and presenting a customized solution that addresses their specific needs, sales professionals can differentiate themselves from the competition and provide unique value to their customers.However, Solution Selling requires a deep understanding of the customer's business and a high degree of customization, which can be time-consuming and resource-intensive. Sales professionals also need to be skilled in overcoming objections and negotiating to close the sale. With the right training and support, however, sales professionals can master the Solution Selling methodology and drive success for their businesses.