Sales Secrets from the Buying Side of the Desk

BUYER-APPROVED SELLING V3.0

MICHAEL SCHELL

Author of the Sales Star

Foreword by Mitch Bardwell
Canon U.S.A., Inc.

Table of Contents

The Research	x
Secret 1: Database Creation & Management	4
Secret 2: Identifying Decision Makers	5
Secret 3: Research	6
Secret 4: Who's Researching Who?	10
Secret 5: LinkedIn Prospecting	13
Secret 6: Email Prospecting	15
Secret 7: 5 Annoying Cold Call Mistakes	18
Secret 8: Typical Cold Calls	21
Secret 9: Permission-Based Introductory Call	23
Secret 10: The Executive Assistant	32
Secret 11: Prospecting Voicemails	33
Secret 12: Managing your Prospecting Ratios	36
Secret 13: Information-Based Webinars	38
Secret 14: Information and Resources	40
Secret 15: Prospecting Mistakes	42
Secret 16: Tough Questions	46
Secret 17: Preemptive Objection Statement	49
Secret 18: Effective Questions	52
Secret 19: The Advance Meeting Agenda	57
Secret 20: Company Overview	65
Secret 21: Objective Questions	67
Secret 22: Industry Specific References	70
Secret 23: Pre-Meeting Checklist	71
Secret 24: The 10-Minute Meeting	72
Secret 25: Email Summary	75
Secret 26: Effective Proposals	82
Secret 27: The Straightforward Close	86
Secret 28: Promises	88
Secret 29: Non-Prospecting Voicemails	90
Secret 30: Record Yourself	92
Secret 31: Edit for Brevity	94
Secret 32: Personal Branding	96
Secret 33: General Sales Advice	99
Secret 34: How to Annoy Decision Makers	105
Decision Maker Contributors	112
Index	114

Foreword

At Canon USA, I am responsible for increasing sales in our distribution channels by training our salespeople on our products, their applications, sales skills, and how to put it all together to sell effectively.

Each year, I review the latest books on sales techniques, processes, and account management. Most are based on the authors' opinions. Very few are based on comprehensive research or input from decision makers. This book is different because it clearly defines how decision makers want salespeople to conduct themselves. Interestingly enough, the research empirically reveals decision makers want you to adopt sales behaviors that many salespeople ignore.

And that's the pearl…differentiation. From brand new hires to seasoned National Account Executives, Canon USA has applied the research from Buyer-Approved Selling for years. I've seen firsthand how the tips and techniques in this book can differentiate a salesperson's approach. In fact, one of our salespeople told me about a half-million-dollar sale he had won. Later, the decision maker told him why they had chosen his solution. When he articulated the reasons why, he could have been reading straight from Buyer-Approved Selling.

This revised edition offers simple, practical tips and techniques you can use with confidence because they are recommended by decision makers. They provide an effective way for you to differentiate yourself, your sales approach, and your company. It's that simple and that powerful.

Mitch Bardwell
Senior Director of BISG Sales Training
Canon U.S.A., Inc.

The Research

A key element that adds value to this book is the quality and integrity of the research. As such, I've outlined some statistics to illustrate our approach to the decision maker interviews.

The Process

From early January 2002 to late December 2011, Marketshare Communications Inc. and Thought Leader Publications Inc. interviewed hundreds of corporate decision makers across North America. Our goal? To identify "approved" sales approaches that build trust through all steps of the sales cycle. In addition, we asked each decision maker to list the sales behaviours that annoyed them the most.

To Date

- Total number of decision maker interviews: **282**
- Total number of questions asked: **4,533**

The Decision Makers

We interviewed a wide cross section of titles including:

- Executive assistant
- IT director
- Marketing manager
- General Manager
- Controller
- President
- HR Director
- Office Manager
- Chairman
- CEO
- VP of Supplier Diversity
- Media Buyer

We surveyed decision makers from companies with 50 to 100 employees to major companies such as Oracle Corporation, Sara Lee, Canon USA Inc. and Verizon. These "buyers" were from a wide range of industries such as Financial Services, Manufacturing, Telecommunications, Education, Aerospace, Software, Printing, Health, Hospitality, Entertainment, Transportation, Mining and more.

Secret 7

The Five Most Annoying Cold Call Mistakes

1: A Lack of Research before the Call

I received a call recently from a financial advisor who represented a major company. I asked her if she knew what my company did and she said, "I have no idea, what do you do?" True story, yet hard to believe...however, the research supports the fact that it happens frequently.

Even if you're calling from a long list of prospects, it's worth your time to do a quick web search. While doing so, you should paste the "about us" section from a company's website into your customer relationship management software.

"Too many reps cold call me without having a real understanding as to what our company does. About 75 percent of reps who call me fit into this category."

— Gary Hubbard, Senior VP of Marketing & Sales
Liberty Northwest Insurance

"If somebody cold calls me and they clearly haven't done any homework, that always bugs me. But, if they say, 'I went on your website,' or 'I attended a conference where Cardinal was a presenter, and I have something that may be of value,' they increase their chance of setting an appointment."

— Kathy Benn, Vice President of Supplier Diversity
Cardinal Health

2: "How Are You?"

You're busy and the phone rings: “Hello John, this is Mary from ABC Co...how are you today?" You have no idea who Mary is, but you're pretty sure she's a salesperson. If you call someone you’ve never met and ask them how they are, it rings hollow. Most of the decision makers interviewed tell us that most salespeople open a cold call that way.

Instead, our research recommends you ask your prospect if they have a quick minute. Common courtesy works.

"Let's say a salesperson cold calls me and says, 'Hello David, this is Mary from ABC financial... *how are you?* My first thought is, I don't know Mary, but I get the sense she's a salesperson. If you don't have a relationship, a question like this is insincere."

— David Bakker, General Manager
ALTA-WIDE Builders Supplies Ltd., Whitecourt

3: Technical Jargon and Acronyms

Some salespeople use technical jargon and acronyms that the prospect doesn't understand. It’s important to speak in terms that your prospect can relate to, so unless you’re speaking to an IT director, try and keep technical terms to a minimum.

Your best approach is a *conversational* one.

“If I speak with a network salesperson, a storage salesperson, or a database salesperson, there could be identical acronyms used in all three fields, yet they mean different things.”

— Stephen Sharp, Director/AGM
Technical Support, IT Infrastructure
Canon U.S.A., Inc.

Secret 16

Tough Questions

Depending on what you're selling, it can be challenging to have all the answers at your fingertips. So if you're caught off guard with a technical type of question, most decision makers don't mind if you go back to the office and email the information to them later.

But when it comes to tough questions that you can anticipate, it's a good idea to prepare clear, to the point responses ahead of time.

An example of a tough question you can anticipate is one that Chris Nield, a Corporate Buyer for International Truck and Engine Corp., routinely asks in a first meeting:

"What differentiates your products or services from your competitors'?"

Another decision maker, Peter Van der Hoek, a Buyer/Planner, has observed:

"I find some reps get baffled when you ask them what the advantages would be in dealing with them. I would think they would be prepared for that type of question, but I am amazed how many are not."

In a perfect world, your company would have crafted a response you can use with confidence. All too often however, salespeople are left to formulate answers on their own. If that's the case, collaborate with your fellow salespeople and sales manager to come up with the one best answer for each question you've anticipated. They will likely come in very handy.

Secret 19

The Advance Meeting Agenda

"I wish salespeople would use this when they meet with me, but I can't recall it ever happening! There are several advantages to an advance agenda. First of all, I can better prepare for the meeting. Plus, without an agenda, you can end up spending your time on the least important items while not having time to focus on the important points."

— Ted W. Biggs, Senior VP & Western Region Sales Manager
U.S. Bank

By the way, Ted rates this approach 10 out of 10 but *never* sees it used by salespeople who meet with him. Crazy but true.

Meetings are time-consuming and a big part of business life, yet far too many suffer from a lack of structure and result in wasted time. As a decision maker, would you have more confidence in a salesperson who consistently sends you a meeting agenda in advance, or with a sales rep who just shows up and "wings" it through a rambling meeting?

This is why I strongly suggest that before every meeting, you email your prospects an advance meeting agenda (AMA) and invite them to make changes to it. It's smart to send your AMA right after you set the appointment over the phone. Then, on the day of your meeting, email it again as a memory jogger.

This reduces the likelihood of a last minute cancellation.

By emailing your prospect an advance meeting agenda, you:

- Show respect for their time.
- Learn more about the company's needs in the process.
- Help the prospect get more involved in the meeting process.
- Let the prospect prepare any required information.
- Show you are proactive, organized, and competent.
- Differentiate yourself from most other salespeople.

Sample AMA:

From: Mark Bourgeois [mailto:mark@thoughtleaderinc.com]
Sent: November-12-09 7:50 AM
Subject: Agenda for Nov 15 meeting at 4pm

Hi Dan,

Here's a basic agenda for our meeting from 4-4:30, Friday, Nov 15 at your office. Feel free to modify.

Objective: Determine if BASE can be of potential value to...

- 45 second overview of our value proposition.
- Discuss challenges unique to your selling environment.
- I read about your new partnership sales program and wondered how it will impact current sales training.
- Answer questions re our proof in advance model.
- Determine appropriate next steps.

Regards,

Mark

The Decision Makers Comment:

"An agenda is important, as it minimizes major surprises and allows me to address any items that are not relevant to the meeting ahead of time. Even if an agenda isn't requested by the buyer, it is a professional courtesy that shows a commitment to a productive meeting and demonstrates your sincerity and commitment before you arrive."

— Mark Baum, Partner
Diamond Management & Technology Consultants
(Rates it 9 out of 10; sees it used by 25% of salespeople.)

"If I'm invited to make changes to an agenda in advance of a meeting, I can outline our technical criteria so the salesperson doesn't have to 'get back to us.' They'd be able to address our criteria during the meeting, since they could consult with their technical people first.

In the email agenda, I suggest including links to relevant pages of their website, along with any information that would be useful ahead of time."

— Stephen Sharp, Director/AGM, Technical Support
IT Infrastructure
Canon U.S.A., Inc.
(Rates it 9 out of 10; sees it used by only 5% of salespeople.)

"Decision makers are busy, so when a salesperson sends an email agenda ahead of a meeting, it shows that they respect my time by keeping things focused and on track. In the case of an initial sales meeting, it also helps the rep pre-qualify the prospect by inviting them to make changes to the agenda in advance of the meeting."

— Frank Vaccaro, Vice President of Sales and Marketing
RobbJack Corporation
(Rates it 10 out of 10; sees it used by only 10% of salespeople.)

Secret 24

The 10-Minute Meeting

The 10-minute meeting is an approach you can use during a permission-based introductory call. You would use it after you've asked the decision maker if they see any potential for your company to be of value, either now or down the road. If they ask you to send some information, you would introduce the 10-minute meeting as follows:

"I could definitely send you some information, but to save you time sorting through brochures, I've prepared a structured 10-minute meeting that, in 10 minutes or less, will allow you to know if we could be of potential value to your company. Do you have 10 minutes next Thursday at 11 a.m.? I won't waste your time..."

Note: Salespeople always ask decision makers for 10 minutes of their time. Yet most go into the meeting and never bring up the time limit. This is not the approach I'm recommending. After you schedule the meeting, be clear you will honor the time limit by sending an AMA stating the start and stop time.

The Decision Makers Comment

"Usually, we are the ones who have to cut the meeting short, so if a rep called and it appeared there might be a fit, a 10-minute meeting to explore possibilities would be an effective way for them to get in the door."
— *Claire Macdonald, Media Buyer, Copeland Communications*

 (Sample, continued in book..)

Secret 25

Email Summary

“It's helpful when a salesperson emails a summary, because it's important to know we're on the same page. But if they make it too long it defeats the purpose. A summary needs to be precise and to the point. I get over 100 emails per day, so if a summary is full of long paragraphs and I've got 50 other emails in my inbox, I'm probably going to skip over it. At best, that means reduced impact. Or worse case, I'll likely never get to it.”

— Ken Gini, American Reprographics Company, Senior VP Corporate Administration & Operations

“I rate this approach 10 out of 10. In my experience, less than 5% of salespeople I deal with summarize key points in writing after meeting with me. But if we were in the market for a particular product, the salespeople who followed this approach would be on my short list (all else being equal).”

— Stephen Sharp, Director/AGM, Technical Support IT Infrastructure, Canon U.S.A., Inc.

If you're like most salespeople, you're looking for a competitive advantage. Look no further, because the written key-point summary *is* that advantage. According to the research, only a small percentage of salespeople summarize the key points of a meeting in writing, but the ones who do are creating a powerful personal brand for themselves.

One of the reasons decision makers appreciate this approach is they often have to share information about the sales meeting with co-decision makers. So if you send them an email summary of your meeting, it's easy for them to forward it.

Speaking from experience, I can say that this is one of the most powerful and useful sales tools I've ever used. But until we did the research for Buyer-Approved Selling, I never used to send summaries. I now send them after appropriate telephone and in-person meetings, and I always receive positive feedback.

When used with the advance meeting agenda, this is an excellent way to cap your sales meeting. Make sure your summary is written in bullet points and is edited for brevity. In addition, always end your summary by identifying next steps and asking "Did I miss anything?"

In a perfect world, you would verbally summarize key points and action items at the close of a meeting as a precursor to your email summary. But that's not always practical. Either way, go back your office and email a key point summary to your prospect. They'll appreciate it.

The Decision Makers Comment

"Summarizing at the end of a meeting has great value. If I were a sales trainer, this is one of the top skills I would teach. It keeps both sides on track and becomes a very effective tool when confirmed via email. I use it as an action item checklist."

— Lynne E. Gehrke, Vice President of Procurement
A. B. Dick Company

"If the rep doesn't summarize the key points and list the action items, then I do."

— Stacey J. Zetterlund, Supervisor, Direct Material Sourcing
MRC Bearings

"Only about 5 to 10% of the salespeople I meet with make sure we've communicated clearly on all points. It's important to summarize what was discussed and identify next steps."

— Kenneth F. Esbin, Purchasing Manager, Tarmac America

About the Author

Michael Schell, President of Thought Leader Publications & Training, is an engaging speaker and trainer who presents at conferences across North America.

Mike is the author of five books: “Winning Sales Advice,” “Buyer Approved Selling,” “The Sales Star,” “The Customer Approved Small Business,” and “Human Resource Approved Job Interviews.” Targeted to business professionals, his books are filled with clear, practical wisdom based on research with the people on the “decision-making” side of the desk.

Companies such as U.S. Bank and The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America have printed custom editions of his books as “gifts of knowledge” for their clients. These custom editions have featured custom forewords by top executives such as Dennis J. Manning, President and CEO of Guardian Life.

Aside from business and writing, Mike’s main passions include song writing, playing guitar in a basement band, cycling, and traveling.

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"Read this book to get feedback from corporate decision makers about how to interact with them throughout the sales cycle. Great advice on ways to respect a decision makers time, increase quality of communication and build trust."

- Lee Ingram, Vice President of Supply Chain Management
ThyssenKrupp Elevator

"After moving into sales, I've tripled my salary by acting as a trusted advisor to executives of public companies. My success is based on a belief in what I'm selling, knowledge, preparedness and the techniques from Buyer-Approved Selling; where one approach builds on the other to instill confidence in the buyer to keep coming back and to recommend you to others."

- Kevin Brown, Licensed Insurance Advisor, Aubin Insurance

"An excellent collection of buyer-centric approaches to get you into a prospective buyers door and earn the right to advance the sale...equally valuable to new and experienced salespeople."

- Ken Gini, Senior VP, Corporate Administration & Operations
American Reprographics Company

"Through detailed research, Schell demonstrates that selling and building trust are often learned skills. Effective execution of the approaches in this book will lead to measurable results."

- Doug Hilton, Sr. Director, Human Resources at ADP

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