

How B2B CMOs and CROs Benefit from Deeply Understanding Customer Goals

Every business person would agree that the better they understand their prospective customers' goals, the better they can serve them. It would improve their chances of winning new business and set the stage for a mutually successful relationship.

Many executive teams see themselves as "customer centric," or "customer driven." These are powerful concepts, but in the B2B world, they often fall short. Frequently there are significant gaps in having a detailed understanding of the goals of prospective new customers. The goals are often vague and partially formed. This lack of understanding has material negative impacts on the sales process and win rates. Yet, most of the time, B2B companies engage in a sales process anyway. Why?

A TYPICAL SALES PROCESS

Let's look at an example for a company that sells marketing automation solutions. A typical sales process is launched from an inbound inquiry where the prospective customer articulates their needs as: "We want to look as improvements in marketing automation." This starts a sales process with a weak level of customer discovery, where only vague high-level goals have been identified.

It's hard to turn away a person at a qualified organization that wants to engage and see demos, even when their goals are loosely framed. You do need to respond to their requests.

WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND DETAILED CUSTOMER GOALS?

One of the difficulties is that many sales people are trained to find "Pain points". Approaching a prospect this way needlessly increases the difficulty in developing the relationship. Talking to a prospect about improvements, with specific and measurable objectives is a much better path. It shapes goals, timing, and it leads directly to value.

Almost all sales interactions start with the customer only able to articulate vague or high-level goals. This problem is *not* the inability of the sales team to ask. It's almost always the prospective customer's inability or reluctance to establish and communicate their goals.

Successful organizations are generally good at doing some level of "discovery" call with a prospect prior to a demo. This often helps to uncover a little more information on the customer's goals.

Using the above example, with some questioning, they might add detail on systems already used, content types, process types for automation and a sense of activity volume. Those are all important and may help provide the information necessary for a proposal/quotation, but they fall short in being framed as goals.

WHAT DO TRUE GOALS LOOK LIKE?

Most of us have heard about SMART goals before. Few have applied the concept in their sales process to build an understanding with a prospective customer. A true understanding of customer goals would have these classic “SMART” goal attributes (*see figure 1*):



Figure 1 SMART goals

The challenge is in transforming the initial understanding of objectives into SMART goals. Both you and your prospective customer will benefit from this.

Failing to frame the customer’s objectives as SMART goals does *not* usually reflect a lack of listening, but rather the customer’s inability or unwillingness to articulate their SMART goals – they simply don’t know, and many sales people are reluctant to press too hard for the details. However, this is a critical opportunity to

bring consultative value into the equation to qualify the fit more quickly, accelerate closure and improve success. SMART goals will also establish compelling events on a timeline with action steps. It also helps gain access to the decision makers that own these types of goals.

IMPROVING THE QUALITY AND UNDERSTANDING OF CUSTOMER GOALS

The most effective way to jointly build SMART goals with your prospective customer is by using the concept of “*reference-based selling*.” Drawing on your expertise with many customers, you can help your prospect by talking about what their peers do. Continuing with the above example, you can have a great conversation with questions like:

- Our customers realize improvements in metadata depth and quality on their new content. It can mean a 5%-20% improvement in content discoverability. Have you considered that objective as part of this project after 3 months of deployment?
- Our other customers in your industry eliminate 10-12 steps in reviewing, approving and distributing content. Based on what you’ve discussed, how many steps do you want to eliminate within six months?

You get the idea. Using customer insights is a great, non-judgmental way to shape goals and turn vague ideas into true SMART goals. If the prospect has no such goals or is unwilling to dig into these types of goals, then it’s probably not an opportunity to spend time on.

Getting customers to identify their SMART goals requires benchmarking information from existing customers and training your team to use it. That is the most valuable sales training possible. Capturing this data successfully requires a systematic and ongoing program to talk with customers in detail about how they have used your solution and benefited from it. And then translating this data into specific training for your sales team.

HOW YOU BENEFIT

With SMART goals your alignment is strengthened with a solid ROI. Your competition will be in a much weaker position. You will:

- Improve your win rate and deal size
- Qualify opportunities more quickly
- Refine scope and details for successful demos
- Help your point of contact understand how and why others need to be involved
- Gain competitive insights
- Identify opportunities to improve your articulation of value and ROI
- Define timelines for the initiative
- Differentiate your company

ABOUT

For questions about this white paper, please contact the author:

Mark Benfer, President of Local Group Communications LLC
Mark.Benfer@localgroupcommunications.com
www.localgroupcommunications.com



