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Be a product adviser

It's time to let go of myths that hinder your success in a sales career

THERE are three sales myths that some sales staff still believe in.

Their misconception sees them spending most of their time with clients who will never justify the return on investment or drives them to produce sales projections that are a triumph of optimism over reality.

Here are the three myths that need to be disposed of immediately:

1 The market is a level playing field

The only way this would be possible is if all the competitors in the market had equal power.

And you know that's not the case. The big and powerful will try to use their muscle to manipulate the market and the smaller competitors will be reliant on their ingenuity, uniqueness and flexibility to get themselves a slice of the cake.

Once you accept the reality of this, you realise that you need to do everything you can to tilt the playing field your way.

To do this, you need to be in a position of influence, so your first goal should be to put yourself into such a position with the decision makers and appropriate stakeholders.

You might do this by working to have them see you as not just an expert in your products, but also an industry expert.

2 Your competitors will play by the rules

Apart from trade practices regulations, anything is fair game. You should use this by being proactive.

Constantly look for strategies to tilt the playing field in a way that suits you and also benefits the client.

The latter is all-important because any suggested change must be presented as an initiative designed to address the client's need, not yours.

It's fine for your competition to accuse you of not playing fair, but if the client thinks you are trying to manipulate the process to suit yourself, you've got problems.

3 You know more about your product than your client does

This used to be the case not so long ago.

As the salesman, you were your customers' primary source of information about your product. Often, you were their only source of information about your product.

Now, they not only have all the data on the company website, they also have access to every blog, forum or discussion board where your product is mentioned.

For the first time since modern marketing methods evolved, consumers of the same product have easy access to one another.

Does this make the salesman redundant?

Far from it. But it does mean that his role might change.

In the past, he was the information source. Now, he needs to be the information sorter.

This doesn't mean that you won't provide new information.

There will probably always be some information that you can access that the client can't.

But providing that information won't be your most important role because the client will have so much additional information that he has accessed himself.

Your problem with clients is not their ignorance but their preconceptions.

Information is not knowledge. Ironically, more information does not necessarily make you better informed.

It has been shown that beyond a certain point, more information makes decision-making harder.

This is where a skilled salesman comes in — asking the right questions, helping to prioritise criteria and sorting the information overload so that the client can make sense of it all and, most importantly, regain his decision-making confidence.

The era of the "re-invented" salesman is upon us. This person will be more a trusted buying adviser than a product pusher — and he will be more important than ever.

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Ask the right questions to help your clients sort their information overload and prioritise their buying criteria. FILE PHOTO

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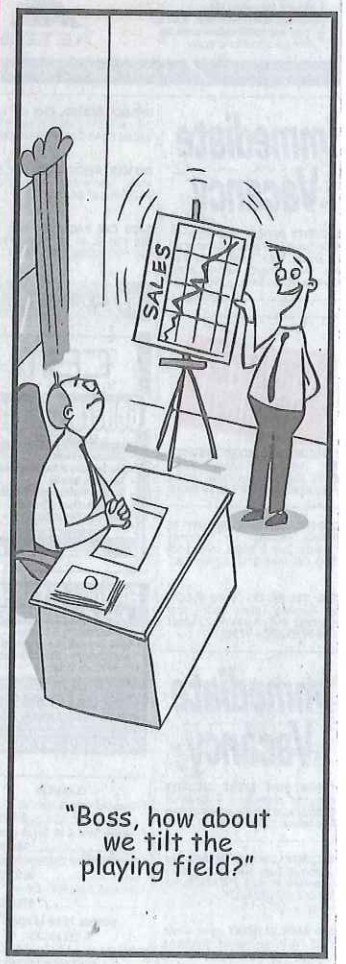
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