HOW TO PREPARE FOR SALES MEETINGS

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INTRODUCTION

Sales meeting isn't always easy. Are they? They are heavy on you and on customer as well. We spend 19% of our time in sales meetings. That's one day per work week - dedicated to **just** meetings.

Unfortunately, **Only 1 in 50 deals are closed upon the first meeting**, according to research by Marketing Wizdom. That's how messed up Customer Meetings are.

I still remember my first sales meeting with a customer quite vividly and how it turned out to be a little bit of disappointment as I was clearly unprepared. And, it's just not me. After working with thousands of Business, Sales Professionals and Entrepreneurs, I have seen people facing same situations where

- Sales People wasn't leading & guiding the conversation.
- Sales People are unprepared with the required materials needed for a successful meeting.
- Sales Professionals had to struggle with some answers to customer's important questions.

And, such situations are no good for the Sales as well as our own Confidence. We've all been in a similar situation, right? But that sales meeting taught me the key element to a sales meeting success—preparation.

SUCCESSFUL PLANNING = SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS HAS BEEN MY MANTRA SINCE THEN.

BUT THE QUESTION IS - WHAT IS IT TO PREPARE?

Recent insight from Gartner on what sales people should know about modern B2B buyers shows that conversations that offer customers a new way to think about or improve their business tend to be more effective.

Some of the key highlights of the study are : Decision confidence can be defined by the customer's ability to feel confident that they:

- Identify which information matters most
- Anticipate necessary changes
- Determine the right questions to consider
- Customer perceptions of a rep are critical

So, you see, it's just not about information, its about Rep too and secret to success lies in how prepared you are.

WANT TO UP YOUR CHANCES OF WINNING THE DEAL? IMPROVE YOUR CUSTOMER MEETINGS?

Well, I'm going to share five essential steps which I practice before I get into a sales meeting.

Let's get started, shall we?

1.WHY THE CUSTOMER MEETING IS KEY TO WINNING SALES DEALS

In a deal cycle, each meeting with a prospective buyer is a milestone activity, and if it's successful, it propels the opportunity forward leading to Sales and Money in the Pocket. And, for that to happen -

PREPARATION IS CRITICAL.

You see, the customer meeting doesn't just include the time you spend face-to-face with the prospect. It also includes the time you spend planning and strategising before the meeting.

SUCCESSFUL PLANNING = SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS

Here's what you can do BEFORE the meeting to set yourself up for a successful, productive meeting that will propel your deal forward and ultimately win.

PRE-PLANNING

The **Pre-Planning** stage is all about taking some time out to think about what you **want from the meeting**, or, **what do you want to come away with at the end of the meeting.**

This sounds obvious, but very often, salespeople set up appointments and meetings without having a clear reason why.

The simple model that I use is: 4WH.

What is 4WH?

4WS AND ONE H: WHO, WHY, WHEN, WHERE, AND HOW.

And here's why it's so important. To be fully prepared for a successful customer meeting, you need to answer these questions:

- Who are you meeting with? The Stakeholders
- Why are the two parties meeting? The Agenda
- When and where will it take place? The Logistics
- How will your Prepare for the Meeting?

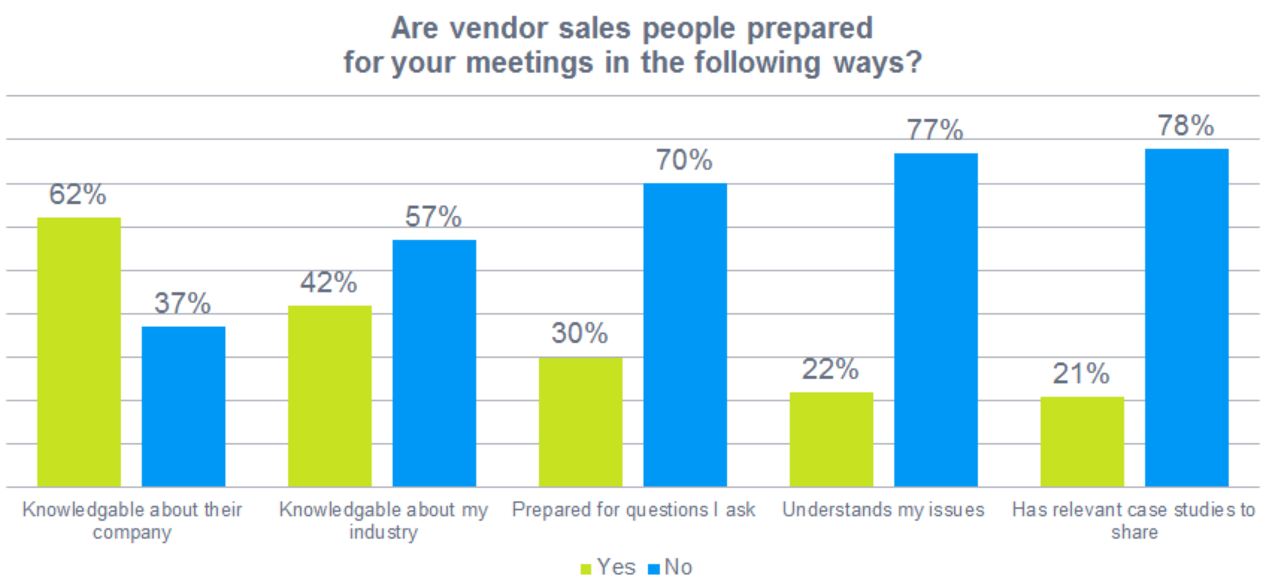
For any given customer meeting, you should be able to answer all of these questions well beforehand.

Let's Decode each section.

2.WHO

GREAT CONVERSATION IS THE FOUNDATION OF GREAT MEETING AND GREAT CONVERSATION BEGIN WITH KNOWING YOUR PROSPECT.

But how many Sales Professionals are learning effectively about their Prospect?
Only 20% as per the Forrester Survey Report.



BUT WHY DO YOU NEED TO KNOW THEM?

People Do Business With People they Like.

And, to make yourself Likeable to Decision Makers your only strength is your Knowledge of them :

- **Their company** & **Customers** to showcase you know them.
- **Their work and priorities** to showcase you understand them.
- **Their personal Interest** for an Emotional Connect and building great relationship.

Know them better than they know themselves and there is no way they can forget you.

The *who* includes the company, the people, and the team you're meeting with. The Bigger is the size of the opportunity, the more number of Stakeholder involved in Decision Making.

In any opportunity, there are :

- Minimum - 2 Decision Makers
- Maximum - upto 10 Decision Makers

ASK YOURSELF:

- What does the company do?
- Where are they based?
- What are some interesting and notable recent news about the company?
- Who are you meeting with?
- What are their roles and responsibilities?
- What personas will be involved in the meeting?
- What are their prior work experiences?
- What are some of the interests and hobbies that they have publicly shared, i.e., Linkedin Profile?

TO FULLY PREPARE FOR THE SALES MEETING, REMEMBER TO:

- Read the company website thoroughly and make sure that you understand their Business Model, mission and objectives.
- Take a look at all recent company news, blog posts and articles. **Pro tip:** Use tools like Owler and Google News to get to know the recent news.
- Try to find out what business and industry are they in. For example, if they are in the manufacturing sector, get an idea of how the manufacturing industry functions, and what are the common jargon and terms they use. When you talk to customers in their language, you are not only gaining their confidence and trust but also building your credibility.
- Find out who will be representing the company at the sales meeting and search for their social media profile on LinkedIn in order to identify their position within the company, their interests, and background
- Try to investigate where this company sits within their respective market, and how they are positioned in relation to their competitors, Potential trends and emerging opportunities you could jump on, as well as some useful personal tidbits about the individuals attending.

YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT YOU MIGHT UNCOVER. SOMETIMES, IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS. MAYBE

- Your customer celebrated a birthday over the weekend, and you never would have known if you hadn't checked her Facebook and Twitter feeds.
- Or, one of their executives just get promoted?
- Was a new industry ruling just announced?
- Did they just lose one of their key customers to a competitor?
- Have they just launched a new product?
- Any one of these developments might represent a business opportunity for you.

Once you have collected this information, try not to overwhelm the prospective client with your new-found knowledge. Use this research for when you are asked questions, rather than include it all in your pitch.

Pro Tip: Find an existing customer in your Company Customer's List in a similar industry that will helps you better understand the business you are dealing with. It also comes in handy if you have to drop a customer reference in that particular industry or a company with similar size to show that you have dealt with a similar customer in the past.

3.WHY

The goal of a sales meeting with a client may feel obvious--you want to sell. But is that a realistic goal for this specific conversation? If you're still in the early phases of the deal, you probably need to break that ultimate "sell" goal into smaller parts.

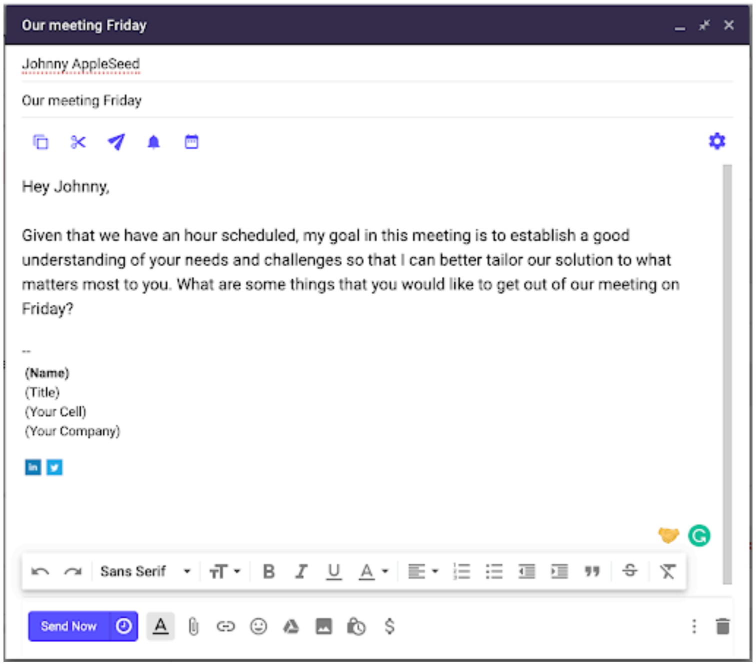
REMEMBER : YOU ARE NOT SELLING A PRODUCT. YOU ARE SELLING A RELIEF TO A WOUND. AND, UNLESS YOU KNOW THE WOUND, YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO PRESCRIBE.

FIRST, DISCOVER THE WOUND - PROSPECT'S BUSINESS DRIVERS AND MOTIVATIONS.

Observe the sales funnel, identify prospect's motive. The answer might be

- More education on what you have to offer,
- Proof that you can provide a solution to suit their unique needs, or
- You are Better than your competition or their existing Solution
- Assistance in making a final decision and making a purchase.

Make your goal clear and tell your client. Here is an example.



Ask yourself:

- Why would they need a Solution?
- What does the prospect expect to accomplish in this meeting?
- What do I want to accomplish in this meeting?
- What do I need to prepare in order to make sure I can meet these objectives?
- What other similar companies have we helped them before?
- How have we helped other similar companies in the same market or with similar challenges and strategic initiatives?
- What part of our solution typically resonates with these types of companies/roles?
- What are some common objections we encounter and what is the best way to handle them?

For this, you should know how your solution aligns to certain industries or teams or initiatives. Look to relevant and similar key customers and partners that will help inform how to best sell to the prospect.

This is your opportunity to elevate the conversation. It's much more compelling for prospects to buy a product from someone who really understands their goals and challenges.

4.HOW

The *how* includes the tactical elements of how you will execute the meeting. Most organisations have a sales process and best practices to help you maximize your chances of winning the deal. You must also have an agenda that is aligned with the WHY.

Furthermore, a clear agenda helps you steer the meeting back to the objectives at hand, so it’s not derailed by tangents and detractors.

Whenever possible, confirm the agenda with your prospect through email and before beginning the meeting. And that’s going to give you a productive and successful meeting that results in a Win-Win for everyone.

ASK YOURSELF:

- Based on my objectives, as well as those of the prospect, what is the best order of operations? What should I cover first?
- Do I have buy-in on the agenda from my prospect?
- How much time do I have and what should be the appropriate allocation of time for each item on the agenda?
- Am I meeting with a few people or a conference room full of several people? If so, how should I engage in asking questions?

MORE EFFECTIVE SALES QUESTIONS = MORE EFFECTIVE ANSWERS

When planning out the questions for your meeting, think about the answers you want to receive.

So, a simple way to do this is to write a quick plan of the info you need in order to reach the next step in your sales cycle or process.

Here's an example:

1. **Sales cycle step I want to reach after this meeting:**

Getting the customer to agree to taking a sample or demo product to try before buying.

2. **Information I need from the customer to achieve this sales cycle step:** I need to know if the customer is working with any other companies on this project, if they are currently demoing any other products, and what results would be important for them to see when demoing the product.

QUESTIONS BASED ON THIS NEEDED INFORMATION:

- Are you working with any other companies and if so, who? (And what stage are you at with these companies?)
- Have you demo any other products as part of this project? What were your experiences?
- What would a successful product sample or demo look like? What results would you need to achieve in order to consider the product demo period a success?

This process of reverse questioning helps you to plan out your questions so that you come away with useful and valuable information, rather than just asking a range of generic questions that don't give you the information you can act on.

5.WHEN & WHERE

The *when* and *where* are pretty straightforward, but because of that, it's easy to overlook some critical pitfalls here.

The last thing you want is for logistical or technical details to cripple or completely derail what would otherwise have been a productive meeting. Access to internet, proper adapters, and working audio/visual are just a few examples.

It pays to be vigilant with the small details.

ASK YOURSELF:

- Will my prospect be able to join the conference call without a problem?
- *Will there be multiple people sitting in a conference room? If so, will I be heard clearly?*
- Am I carry all the Tools needed to be Up & Running such as Connectors, Laptops, Chargers, Pads, Brochures etc…

Make a List of all the Items needed in the last meeting. Keep it handy in a written note or on Phone to always cross-check.

6.ADDITIONAL: GETTING ‘MEETING READY'

DON’T SKIP SLEEP

You will want to be both focused and alert. By being fully prepared for your sales meeting days in advance, you can eliminate the need for last minute all-nighters, which can severely impact your confidence, concentration level and delivery.

POWER UP YOUR GADGETS.

If you’re going to need any of your laptop/mobile devices during the meeting, don’t walk in with empty battery. Remember to bring power cords or charge boosters. And don’t rely on charging your device in a conference room. Your customer might want to shift the meeting location at the last minute.

REVIEW YOUR PITCH

It’s common for pitches to become complicated, filled with clichés and buzzwords such as “forward thinking”, “dynamic” and “synergy” which may not hold any meaning for the prospective client.

If you’re unsure about what to add/ remove, here are some questions to help you:

- Does your pitch address all requirements and meet the needs of the potential client?
- Have you demonstrated that your company understands the industry?
- Is it clear why you should be chosen above all other candidates/ vendors?
- What questions might arise during the pitch?

HOLD A “PRACTICE” MEETING

No top performer would set foot on the stage or in the arena without a rehearsal and warm-up, and successful salespeople are no different.

Seven days prior to your sales meeting, hold a “practice” meeting with your colleagues to make sure that your sales pitch is clear and, if any colleagues are attending the meeting with you, that you are all on the same page.

CONFIRM MEETING LOCATION

Drop an Email or Give a Call to your Customer to confirm the meeting a day prior to the meeting. Confirm its date & time, Location etc…Often priority Changes leading to rescheduling of the meeting. However, not every time it will on top of your client's agenda to remind you. So, it's always better to confirm it a day before.

CENTER YOURSELF

You should look at every meeting with a customer as a chance to create joy for that person. Before you walk into the meeting, center yourself. Don’t carry your feelings about any bad experiences into the meeting. The customer will sense your energy and feel your presence as heavy and negative.

You can do this in very simple ways. Find a quiet space and close your eyes. Relax your stomach muscles and let your arms hang loosely at your sides. Roll your neck a few times if your shoulders feel tight. Inhale through your nose and fill your lungs to capacity. Then, release that air in a single breath. Repeat that three times.

MAKE A GREAT FIRST IMPRESSION

It takes clients seconds to determine how confident, friendly and capable you are, all of which will play a role in their decision to do business with you[1]. Here are a few ways to make a great first impression:

- **Appearance** – Your personal image affects a client's perception. Make sure you dress appropriately for the business you are pitching to.
- **Body language** – According to Brian T., 55% of your sales pitch is in your body language. This includes your posture, the strength of your handshake and how much eye contact you make.

CHECK ANY ORDER HISTORY AND CUSTOMER SERVICE ISSUES

There's nothing worse than walking into a meeting with a customer who's steamed about some aspect of your product or service and has been looking forward to your meeting as an opportunity to unload a litany of complaints.

Investigate any outstanding issues before the meeting. If you want to use some of your meeting time to address those issues, let the customer know you're willing to discuss them. And, if that's the case, come prepared with a list of ways you're ready to support the customer to alleviate his or her concerns.

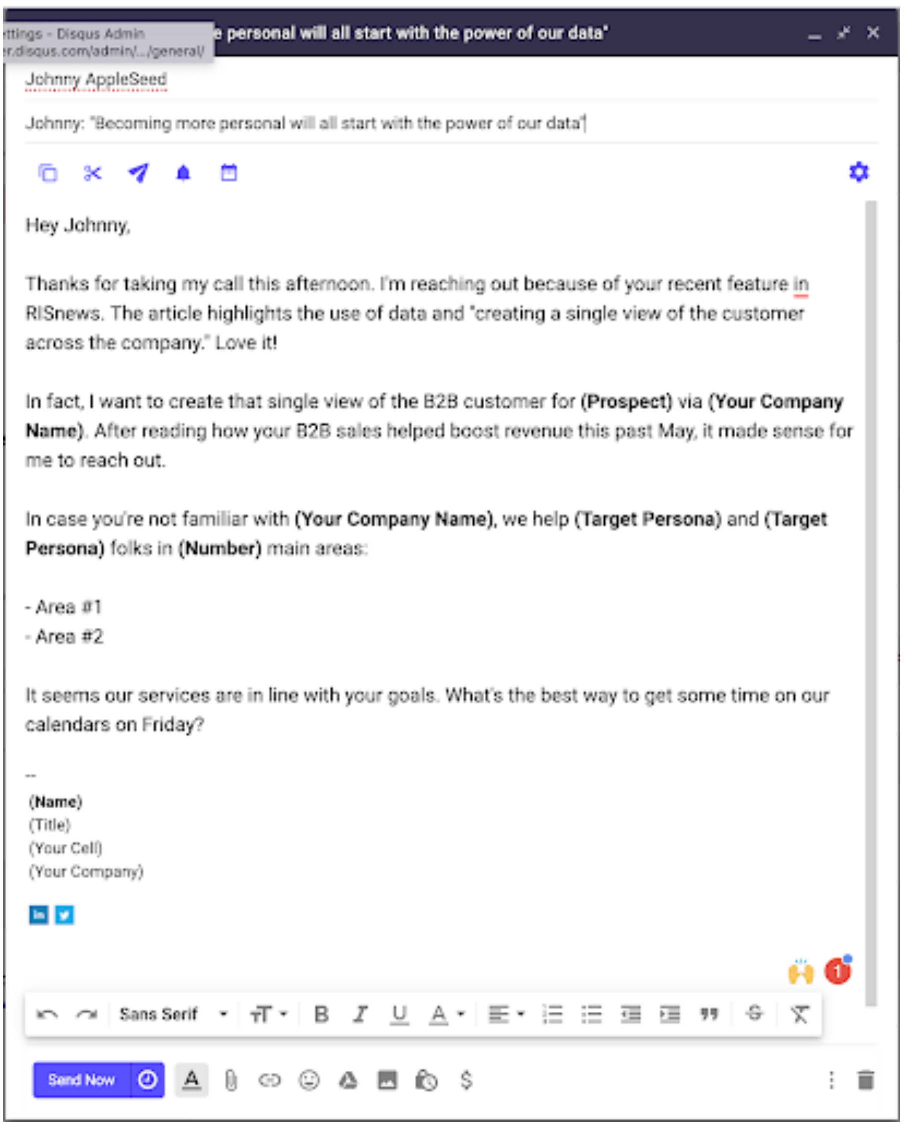
7. BONUS: HOW TO CRACK SALES MEETING?

Meetings are great, but meetings with the right timing are much better.

But here's the thing…

People won't give you their time unless you earn it. So even *before you get the customer meeting*, you need to earn the prospect's time by making every point of contact hyper-relevant. One way to do that is to set the tone before the meeting ever happens.

1. Find a relevant social post, article, or news item that you can engage them with.
2. Then send a message like this:



The best part about structuring your emails in this fashion is that it sets up all your other outbound activities as well.

Now, when you call into the account or engage them on social, you have a great story to tell that is highly relevant to the solution you are trying to sell.

This is what I mean by EARNING the meeting — and the key is being relevant. Persistence alone cannot save you. Neither can personalization, if used alone.

But persistence and personalization coupled with relevance? That's how you EARN a meeting. Happy hunting!


AUTHORITATIVE SELLING
Art of Convincing 'Not Interested' Customers and Winning 70% Sales
01
02
03
04
Dishah | Best Corporate Training Companies in India.
CR Magazine
Authoritative Selling | Top Sales Training Programs.
Great Companies Magazine
Amit Sharma | Top Sales Influencer in India.
Sales Adda
10,000+ Sales Professionals & 100+ Corporate Trained.
Activate Windows
Go to Settings to activate Windows.