

SALES:

Communicating Value in Selling

In the last issue of *Groundwork*, we discussed sales prospecting, the first step in bringing new customers on board. According to Joe Bannon, Senior Vice President, Global Marketing and Brand Strategy at 5MetaCom, the next piece of the sales puzzle is communicating value to prospective customers. Here are some things to keep in mind about how to communicate the value of products and the importance of dialogue.

"In order to communicate value, you have to understand each customer's needs," Joe says. "When you understand what they're trying to do and learn what's important to them, you can match up your information and offer based on what they value," he adds. That means if yield is most important, that's what you should be discussing, but if it's seed delivery, that's where your focus should be.

Often, a sales representative can spend too long on the wrong element. Sales reps like to talk about all the technical aspects of seed products, but it's important to stay focused on what a customer values. They may incorrectly believe that most seed companies offer similar products, so they're going to base their decision on the quality of agronomy support.

"In seed sales, value goes far beyond what's in the bag. It's everything about your company – your brand, technical support, delivery, service – plus their view of your character and your relationship," Joe says, adding that a customer's view of all of these pieces goes into their decision about which company to use.

Joe's advice on the best way to build a relationship with a customer is through a dialog – not a monologue.

"The best salespeople use a combination of asking and telling," Joe says. "Most customers – 95% of them – say that sales reps talk too much. We may get excited about our great products and go on and on about what we have to sell, but 74% of customers say they're more likely to buy if a rep would just shut up and listen to them!"

Another area where sales representatives sometimes miscommunicate is when it comes to discussing **quality** versus **value**. Value is the total package that you're offering – the product, service and the intangibles of dealing with a product or company. "Quality is subjective," Joe cautions. "We use it

to mean best or better, but what it really means is the right fit for the right need, so quality will have a different meaning for each person." For example, what's the best quality vehicle? For you, it might be a pickup, for someone else, it might be a sports car – it's a matter of how it fits the need. Sales reps and customers



may have different definitions of what "quality" seed means. Indeed, the seed in another brand's bag may meet the customer's expectation for "quality." But value encompasses the seed and much more – everything a customer gets along with the product we're selling. Even if the farmer perceives the varieties in the bag to be "the same," the total package or offering between brands is different.

Another thing to keep in mind is that most customers will have done research on you before you talk or after your first interaction. Research says this happens 57% of the time, but Joe thinks it might be even greater in our Covid-impacted world, up to 75% of the time. The best thing sales representatives can do is engage in a dialog, asking a potential customer what they know about your company or products and if they have any questions, then let that lead you into a conversation, versus just sharing a lot of information. Then you can build on what they already know. "Ask the right questions – if they already know about FIRST trials results, ask how important they are or how those results compare to what they've experienced in their fields," Joe advises. "Then shut up and let them talk!" Through this dialog, you'll be able to share additional information that the customer finds important.



Joe Bannon, Senior Vice President, Global Marketing and Brand Strategy at 5MetaCom, has over 40 years experience in agricultural sales and marketing, and currently works with B2B companies on brand strategy, internal alignment and sales training.



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