

SALES:

Effective messaging comes in

3

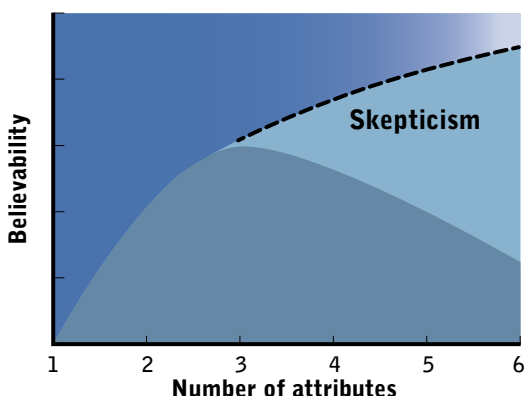
In previous issues of *Groundwork*, we covered the sales process – from prospecting through closing the sale. In this final article in the series, we talk to Joe Bannon, Senior Vice President, Global Marketing and Brand Strategy at 5MetaCom, about some guidelines for communicating effectively.

Joe spoke previously about how important it is to establish a dialog when building relationships with potential customers. He relates this back to statistics that show 95% of customers think that salespeople talk too much. And when it's the sales rep's turn to talk, Joe wants to help seed sellers use that opportunity most effectively.

Many studies show that information is remembered best when it is presented in threes. We're all taught to "stop, look and listen" before crossing the street or to "stop, drop and roll" if we're on fire. Years ago, a pair of professors wondered how this "power of three" impacted persuasive messaging. They pondered how many attributes you should list when you're trying to persuade someone to buy your product or service. Their research found that presenting up to three attributes made believability go up, but exceeding that number made customer skepticism increase. Essentially, four claims or more led customers to perceive a product as too good to be true. The researchers published their findings under the heading "When Three Charms but Four Alarms."¹

Joe suggests picking the top three attributes of your offering to share with each customer. The attributes you choose will depend on what is most important to the specific customer, so you'll have to connect back to what you've learned about

Persuasion: When Three Charms¹



Power of 3

Believability decreases and skepticism increases with more than 3 product benefits/attributes

them throughout your relationship building. "Everything ties back to getting to know the customer and what they want or need," says Joe. "But keep it simple and only offer three points." Once you know what's important to the customer, you can tailor the information you share. "For example," Joe says, "you might say: 'We have a great 112-day hybrid that's performed well in this area, we have a special seed treatment this year and for the personalized service you want – I'm your man.'"

Joe and his colleagues at 5MetaCom also work in threes – they advocate communicating in small bites of information, including a three-second headline and three support points (all of which should take only 30 seconds to share).

“ If I can give a headline and three support points and then stop, I know I've got a greater chance of getting into a dialog with a customer, as opposed to a monologue where I'm just spewing information and hoping something sticks. ”

In addition to communicating in threes, Joe recommends using repetition to help customers remember information about your products. Up to 95% of new information that people receive is forgotten within 30 days if they don't hear it again.² For seed reps, where it might be months between your interactions with potential customers, Joe suggests revisiting your three key attributes on each visit, possibly bringing new information each time. "Maybe you've talked previously about finding products that fit a farmer's need. The next time you visit, you could bring a product guide with some suggestions circled. The next visit, see if they looked at those products and ask if any others caught their eye. That's how you keep that dialog going."

One last tip Joe offers for communicating effectively is to show as well as tell. Seeing information presented in multiple ways – using multiple senses – helps memory retention. "A picture is worth a thousand words," Joe advises. For example, showing a potential customer photos of local crop damage can reinforce your treatment recommendations. Joe suggests saying something like: "Here's the kind of damage we saw in this region last year. This is why we recommend applying an early-season fungicide."

Presenting information in threes – repeatedly – and showing as well as telling can help you communicate more effectively with potential customers.



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

¹Shu, Suzanne B. and Kurt A. Carlson. "When Three Charms but Four Alarms: Identifying the Optimal Number of Claims in Persuasion Settings." *Journal of Marketing*, 78(1) (Jan. 2014): 127-139.

²McDonald, Colin. *Advertising Reach and Frequency* (Hermann Ebbinghaus, Contrib.). Lincolnwood, IL: NTC Business Books, 1996.

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