HOFFMAN MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

EFFECTIVE SALES PRESENTATIONS: ADVANCING THE SALES CYCLE

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Effective software sales presentations are at the core of a successful sales cycle, yet many presentations miss the mark in terms of appropriate content and flow. While presentation skills contribute to the success (or failure) of a sales presentation, presentation effectiveness also hinges on the *value of the message* and the *quality of the content*. Your sales team relies on you to deliver a solid presentation that they can successfully use in their selling efforts. Here are proven methods for ensuring that your sales team is armed with the content they need to win deals.

Taking Inventory

Before you begin creating a presentation, take inventory of the information you'll need to get started. This will serve as a checklist to ensure that you and your team are staying on course and creating a presentation that will hit the mark. Engage your sales representatives in creating this list—they typically know which messages resonate best with different prospects. They can also provide input as to how they intend to use the presentation, and what tactics and content have (and have not) worked in the past.

- Identify the target audience and their business issues
- Determine the goal of the presentation and its role in the sales process (e.g., to generate interest in learning more about your product or service, or to gain introduction to the decision maker?)
- Determine the level of detail appropriate for the audience
- List key messages for the software solution (e.g., value proposition and key differentiators)
- Enlist appropriate reviewers (e.g., sales, marketing, and pre-sales technical engineering personnel) to ensure full content accuracy as well as help establish interdepartmental "buy-in")

An outline helps identify "branch slides" needed to address a specific industry or audience.

Think Outside the PowerPoint Slide

Many presentation writers try to brainstorm the story they want to tell while using PowerPoint. But crafting a story when you are limited to bulleted concepts can be difficult. Instead, try writing out the story you would like to tell. (You can leverage this to create speaker notes – more on this later.) By formally capturing your thoughts in a written document, you can craft your story faster and easier. Key reviewers may find it easier to provide critical feedback on your "story" as well.

For example, the following is a sample guide that can help you outline an overall concept and define what content needs to be included. An outline also helps the presentation team members consider "branch slides" that can help address a specific industry or audience member (e.g., a CFO).

#	Slide Title	Key Elements and Messages	Possible Branch Slide Sets
0	**Title Slide**	(Self explanatory)	
1	**Agenda**	Summary of content to be covered	
2	**Key Trends**	If applicable, describe key industry or business trends in order to provide a context for the business problems/customer pain points described in the next slide.	• Vertical audiences: branches that drill down on industry-specific trends
3	**Business Challenges/ Pain Points**	List the pains/challenges facing businesses/employees that do not have the particular solution being offered. The goal is to help the audience identify personally, feel the "pains" as their own.	• Vertical audiences: branches that drill down on industry-specific pain points
4	**Understanding the Problem**	Elaborate on the complexity of the problem and how existing processes, workflows, customer demands, etc. require a new approach to the particular business area.	• Line-of-Business audiences: branches that drill down on business problems to be solved, for example, for a VP of Sales or CEO.
5	**The Answer: Your Solution**	Introduce your solution by providing a high-level introduction that answers the questions, "What is it? Why should we spend our limited budget on it? What's the real value?" If possible, graphically illustrate the solution and how it provides business value (show rather than tell).	• IT audience: a branch that discusses the larger IT environment that this particular solution requires
6	**Key Capabilities and Business Value**	Prove the business value by explaining how the solution provides a capability or benefit that solves one or more of the business challenges listed previously.	• Industry audiences: include branches with industry-specific benefits that demonstrate a deep understanding of the industry-specific pain points and how the solution addresses them

Prospects must be convinced you understand the business obstacles they are trying to overcome.

7	**ROI/Business Case**	Summarize the business case for the solution by providing benefits backed up with ROI data (dollar figures or percentages regarding cost savings, increased productivity, reduced downtime, etc.).	Expand the business case with branches that may include: • CXO audience: Slides that elaborate on how the solution impacts both the top and bottom line through "hard" and "soft" returns (reduce costs, increase revenues) • Industry-specific audiences: industry-specific ROI data, if available
8	**Customer Success Story**	Describe a powerful customer success story with ROI data, if available.	• Industry audiences: branches of industry-specific success stories • LOB audiences: branches with LOB-specific success stories
9	**Next Steps**	What is the call to action?	• Depending on the audience, the next step may to seek an introduction to the decision maker or to show a demo of your solution to the technical group.

Keep it Focused…On the Customer

In today's business world, your audience has probably already researched your company and its products on your Web site. So if prospects invite your sales representative to their offices, they really want to know how your software solution will solve their business issues and pain points. The prospects must be convinced that you understand the business obstacles they are trying to overcome. This fact alone may mean you need to create more than one presentation for a specific product or solution, perhaps focused by industry or by audience type (e.g., the budget owner wants to hear different points than the implementer of the solution).

The following table of typical stakeholders across a company can help you consider the presentations that you may need to create for different audiences.

Provide your sales team with ready-made slides for customizing.

Stakeholder Profile	Characteristics
Initiator	Has identified the problem areas to address and has asked staff to identify possible solutions.
User	Will be the one to actually implement/use the solution. Concerned about ease of use and support.
Influencer	Will likely define technical specifications and provide information for evaluating options. Wants to understand the technical underpinnings of the solution and how it fits into the overall enterprise architecture.
Decision maker	The one to make the final recommendation to the approver. Ultimately responsible for ownership of the solution, including implementation, integration, internal support, and tracking ROI.
Buyer	Controls finances. May question price, ROI, TCO.
Approver	Top management with final budget authority. Needs to be convinced the solution is the best option for the money.

Plan for Customization

Experienced marketers know that their sales representatives will customize presentations to fit their prospects' needs. This behavior should be encouraged, not discouraged. After all, your sales representatives will be most successful if they have done their homework to understand the unique business pains facing their prospects and how your company's solution can address those issues. The sales person may not be presenting to an individual or group for the first time, and therefore, may have to tailor the content to cover only the most relevant information. After all, nothing loses an audience more quickly than covering stale material.

While you must be willing to relinquish some control over *how* and precisely *what* your sales team presents, your role is to provide the foundation for a logically flowing, compelling presentation that adheres to corporate standards for messaging, language, and design. One way to maintain some content control is to include an appendix with branch slides suitable for various industries and company sizes, etc. For instance, survey the sales force during presentation development to learn what success stories would be most useful and include those as extra slides for use as needed. By providing easy-to-use, ready-made slides, you *know* your sales people can customize the presentation to meet their needs without compromising the standards of the material.

Make sure bullet points are not reduced to industry jargon and sound bites.

Balance Brevity with Useful Detail and Illustrations

For better or for worse, bulleted lists tend to be the dominant form factor in PowerPoint. The advantage of bullet points is that they prevent overzealous authors from trying to convey every bit of information about your company. Bulleted lists present a concise summary of your message, and can be easily read by those listening to the presenter. The presenter expands on points where necessary, which can often only be determined by "reading" the audience. To ensure that the bullet points are read, make sure your bullets convey valuable information and are not reduced to industry jargon and sound bites.

Similarly, do not try to fit every piece of information about a point onto the slide—leaving something for the speaker's notes ensures that the audience will listen to the presenter and keeps the amount of screen-cluttering text to a minimum. At the same time, your content should be memorable and meaningful to the prospect. Remember that people grasp pictures more quickly than words. Visually illustrate your points whenever possible with a graph or image and make sure you choose visuals that help to further the audience's comprehension of your points.

Mastering Organization

Although a story isn't compelling if it doesn't flow properly, determining the optimal flow of a story is difficult until all the parts have been recorded. Even best-selling authors rarely establish the flow without many rounds of reorganizing. So, after you've created your first draft and walked through a practice run, shift the content around until the flow feels natural and the presentation tells a compelling story. If you've backed up your key points with persuasive supporting content, such as industry statistics, analyst quotes, or customer testimonials, you're likely to see a positive response to your presentation.

Your sales representative may choose to present only portions of the presentation. For that reason, make sure you "modularize" the presentation into discrete sections that make sense on their own. You'll also need to ensure the presentation flow is strong regardless of which or how many modules are skipped over. (See "Test and Revise" below).

By providing speaker notes, you can ensure a basic level of messaging consistency.

What Goes into Speaker Notes?

As the marketing guru, you need to provide scripted speaker notes so the presenter has detailed information about each of the points on the screen. Since you started the creation process by capturing your presentation in story form, you can now lift from that document to build your speaker's notes.

While some presenters may add a personal twist to the story, the story should essentially remain the same—by providing speaker notes, you can ensure a basic level of messaging consistency. And have faith in your sales people—in many cases, they don't require a narrative script as much as clear, concise talking points presented in a logical order.

Test and Revise

Finally, make sure you test the presentation with a few sales people (both senior and junior). As part of this testing, you should see how well the presentation works when skipping over certain sections. Obtain feedback and revise the presentation appropriately. Nothing ruffles the feathers of the sales team more than being handed a sales tool that doesn't meet their needs—especially when they're sitting right down the hall from you and are often eager to provide input into the development of these tools.

No sales presentation will be successful without aligning your sales and marketing organizations. With such goal-oriented cooperation in place, you can help your sales representatives succeed by providing them with a customer-centric message that clearly explains how your solution solves the prospect's business issues. Ultimately, by managing the messages in your company's sales presentations, you can increase the effectiveness of your sales team's communications and help shorten the sales cycle.

Hoffman Marketing Communications, Inc., specializes in writing white papers, sales guides, and marketing collateral for leading technology companies around the world. Since 1985, Hoffman has developed persuasive sales and marketing materials for more than 100 clients, including Symantec, SAP, HP, Adobe, Research in Motion, Thomson West, and Sprint. Applying the extensive skills and experience of its writers, Hoffman minimizes ramp-up time for new marketing projects, helps accelerate new products and services to market, and provides marketing and sales teams with the persuasive materials they need. For more information, call 408-778-5664, email info@hoffmanmarcom.com, or visit http://www.hoffmanmarcom.com.

HOFFMAN
MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS
Strategic business and technology writing

322 Digital Drive
Morgan Hill, CA 95037
P: 408-778-5664   f: 408-778-5663
Info@hoffmanmarcom.com
www.hoffmanmarcom.com