

Can Your Salespeople Tell Business Value Stories?

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July 17,
2019

Your sales team is sharp. They did their homework, they knew which customers to target, they understood the challenges customers were facing, and they knew which solutions fit best.

So why didn't they close more deals?

Most likely, it was because they failed to present a compelling story. Either your competitor had a better one or yours wasn't inspiring enough to successfully challenge the status quo. To win, salespeople must craft persuasive, customer-centric, value-differentiating stories that connect with buyers.

Why is storytelling such an effective sales tool? Science has a lot to say about that.

The Neuroscience of Storytelling

Thanks to technological advances, neurologists can prove storytelling evokes measurable changes in a listener's brain. When you engage your buyer in a story, you're activating areas of the brain that affect emotion and empathy as well as syncing your brain's activity with your buyer's.

Build Trust Through Neural Coupling and Oxytocin

Using functional Magnetic Resonance Imagery (fMRI), scientists investigated alignment of neural activity between speaker and listener during natural verbal communication. They discovered that this neural coupling is most pronounced when the speaker and listener share the same real-life story; in this scenario, both participants share very similar brain activity.

Stories that resonate with your buyer activate the limbic system, the brain structure responsible for emotions, memory, and learning. Neuroeconomist Paul Zak studied the release of oxytocin in the listener's brain and how it increases a person's empathy and trust. He writes, "The brain network that oxytocin activates is evolutionarily old. This means that the trust and sociality that oxytocin enables are deeply embedded in our nature."

Stories Are Inherently Persuasive

Humans naturally process incoming information as stories, in what Michael Dahlstrom of Iowa State University calls narrative pathways. According to his research, we are most

influenced by external narrative messages, or stories from outside sources, especially sources perceived as credible. These stories are inherently persuasive and can dramatically influence a listener's decision making.

It's Not Your Story—It's the Buyer's Story

Understanding the science behind why you need good storytelling in sales is only part of winning deals. While every good salesperson knows that facts and figures are essential, you also need to know what your customer most cares about. Your buyer's concerns make up the heart of a successful business value story.

Buyers Will Help You Shape Winning Stories

Business value stories follow a reliable framework. The narrator presents a challenge, tension builds within the mind of the listener (activating the brain), and both speaker and listener work together toward a resolution (releasing oxytocin).

What makes a business value story different from traditional storytelling is the inclusion of the customer as a secondary, authoritative narrator. As your story asks questions and seeks clarification, you raise your buyer's awareness and interest. The story begins to evolve with your buyer's input.

When you finally get to the point of making recommendations, your buyer has already developed a sense of ownership. It may have started as your narrative, but now it's theirs, too.

Business Value Stories Go Where a Sales Person Can't

Psychologist Jerome [Bruner](#) suggests that the mind has a "narrative mode" and that people are 22 times more likely to remember a story over facts and figures. The brain's natural narrative pathways simply don't retain data dumps and endless bullet points.

Feeling connected to the narrative they helped to shape compels your buyer to share the story with others—a colleague, key stakeholders, or a primary decision maker. Because the narrative is now theirs as much as it is yours, it's easier for them to remember and, more importantly, easier to retell.

Create Your Own Business Value Stories

By following the repeatable storytelling framework of highlighting a problem the buyer cares about then working toward a solution with value-differentiated outcomes, your sales team will create better connections with customers, lead more productive conversations, and close more deals.