

Advertising Sales Strategies For This Time Of Crisis

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The terrible events of September 11 shook the entire nation. And as is often the case in such a tragedy, our first reaction is to want to do something to help. The second is to freeze. There's so little we can do to help and we feel that somehow there's something wrong with doing anything else. That helpless paralysis, of course, is exactly the way our enemies want us to react.

The only way to combat this paralysis is to get on with the business of living. Yes, we should and will mourn the lost lives, comfort the aggrieved, and honor those who responded to the call for help. But it is best for everyone that we show that this nation will not collapse into helplessness in the face of adversity.

Many advertisers are at best uncertain about whether they should advertise and if so, what they should say. Here are some thoughts on dealing with the generic objection "I won't advertise because of the terrorist attacks."

Creative Selling Objection Techniques

Let's begin with a very brief overview of objection techniques.

Some sellers think that the way to "overcome the objection" is to win the argument with your customer. But arguments have no place in selling because they actually block progress toward a sale by making you the customer's adversary. Don't overcome objections-manage them.

In *Creative Selling* we suggest you adopt the attitude that you are going to be an ally to your customer, not their adversary. You're not going to prove them wrong for refusing to buy your product, you're going to create a way that they can buy it. You're not going to win the argument, you're going to win the sale. Remember, you're not there to bludgeon the prospect into submission.

The first step in managing an objection is to listen to the prospect. Listen to what he says and how he says it. Make sure you hear what the prospect is saying-and don't react until you do.

Now re-state the objection. This is to make sure you're hearing what the prospect is saying and for a couple of other pretty good reasons as well. First, you make sure you've got it right-it gives the prospect a chance to correct

you before you do any damage by answering the wrong objection. Secondly, it gives you a little time to think about what your next action should be. Is this a question or an objection? Is it sincere or a smoke screen?

The next step expands the good feelings you're building. You essentially agree with the objection! This makes the prospect feel really good. You've told them how perceptive they are. You've congratulated them on seeing through to the heart of the matter. Your agreement comes in the form of "I can see your point, but let's consider this..." Then offer one of the concepts outlined below.

There are several alternative routes you can take at this point. Your first choice should always be to just ignore the objection and go on with your presentation. This isn't as crazy as it sounds, because it's the best way to find out if the objection is real or just a smoke screen. If it's a real obstacle to the prospect buying your proposal, it will come up again when you ask for the order. If it's not, it'll just go away-and this happens more often than not. Either way, you haven't lost any ground.

As soon as you can, take the final step in managing an objection-close the sale. This may seem a little aggressive, but it's actually a natural extension of the conversation you're having with the prospect. You've just completed the final step in the closing process, which is reviewing the benefits. You've agreed on most of the issues, right? So why not extend that agreement to the proposal itself?

There's no silver bullet to kill every objection. It takes a calm, controlled, persistent effort to listen attentively, restate carefully, agree amicably, and ask for the order over and over and over. Listen, Restate, Agree, Close. It's a simple formula for successfully managing objections.

Current Crisis Objections

Now let's deal with the three basic forms this objection can take.

Objection One: People will think I'm a money-grubbing profiteer with no concern for human suffering if I advertise now.

- Don't over-estimate your importance to the consumer, especially in times when so many other things are on people's minds.

- President Bush has stressed over and over again that we should not act defeated by terrorism. If we allow the terrorists to disrupt the way we do business, we're giving them a victory.
- Conducting "business as usual" is the best way to quickly re-establish positive feelings in the public mind.

Objection Two: The tragedy will plunge the economy into a recession and business will be so bad I need to cut back.

- There was no fundamental reason for a prolonged recession before the tragedy. In fact, there were signs in early September that the economy is perking up. If the events of September 11 have any effect on the economy, it will be very short-lived.
- Numerous studies, including one by the AAAA of the eight recessions from 1948 to 1982, show that consumer spending actually grows from the quarter when the economy peaks to the quarter in which it bottoms.
- The competitor who advertises when others are cutting back gets more bang for the buck. Even maintaining the same spending levels results in a higher share of voice.
- Advertising doesn't affect just today's business. It actually has greater impact on tomorrow's-when the business climate will inevitably be better. Cutting back today will hurt your business later.

Objection Three: My business has been disrupted by transportation problems, inventory shortages, increased fuel costs, etc., so advertising will just bring me business I can't handle.

- Since your advertising is an investment in your future sales, cutting it in response to today's temporary problems will hurt tomorrow's business-and won't solve the immediate problems, either.
- You've spent many dollars over many years developing the trust of your customers. What happens to that trust when they stop hearing from you?
- The best strategy is to shift your advertising emphasis from immediate-response promotion to long-term position building. Use this opportunity to solidify your reputation and build your image.
- What steps are you taking to overcome these problems? Looking for other sources of inventory? Other shipping providers? Don't send your customers away-advertise to let them now you're working to solve those problems so you will be able to continue to serve them.

Crisis Advertising Ideas

Creative Selling isn't just about managing objections. It's about pro-actively giving the advertiser valuable ideas that will help solve his problems. Here are some brief advertising ideas and themes that will work in this situation. The three types of messages could be used sequentially to keep the advertiser's name in front of the consumer in a positive way.

Compassion Promotions - Ideas that demonstrate the advertiser's support for the victims and volunteers.

- Blood donors receive a giveaway from the advertiser. (This should not be tied to a purchase in any way.)
- The advertiser's business serves as a collection point for emergency supplies and/or items for the survivors and the victims' families.
- The advertiser establishes a Relief Fund for survivors, families, and rescuers, many of whom lost income while volunteering their time.
- Letters of support, children's drawings, and other messages are collected by the advertiser and sent en masse to relief organizations.

Patriotic Theme Ideas - Ideas that proclaim the advertiser's steadfast loyalty.

- We're behind the USA. Our business has prospered in our country's free enterprise system and we're grateful.
- We won't be defeated. Continuing to serve our customers is the best way we know to show how strong our country is.
- We're proud to be Americans. We salute the thousands of volunteers who have unselfishly given their time and labor in this moment of need.

Recession Promotions - Ideas that help keep the advertiser's business moving during slow economic times.

- We know it's tough out there. Check out our everyday low prices.
- Price-Value promotions. All types of sales, coupon offers, discounts, etc.
- Extended terms. Easy credit, no down payment, no payments for six months, etc.

I hope these ideas help you deal with the terrible situation and difficult times we all face. If you would like to share your thoughts, please email davedonelson@elconline.com or call me at (914) 949-7483.