

WHITE PAPER

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Sales Excuses and Responses

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I hear sales excuses all the time. I have probably used a few in my day as well. But all they are is excuses. I once had a boss who told me, "A poor workman blames his tools." Since that day, I have done my best to try not to blame other things or people for my inability to complete a task successfully in an effective and efficient manner. I am in the sponsorship marketing business. We consult with and advise organizations that buy and sell sponsorships. So naturally, I hear excuses all the time. I know there are a few people who will read this and say, "Man, I cannot believe there are people out there like that!" To those of you thinking that: Wake up and smell the coffee. This one is most likely directed at you!

Here is my baker's dozen of excuses that I do not want to hear. I have married them with a few that were published earlier this year by Todd Hockenberry. In fact, I know as Todd pointed out, these are lines you will never hear from a great salesperson.

1. "The product sucks!" My reaction is "Why did you take the job?" You knew what you were selling prior to accepting the job. If you failed to understand the product to begin with, the fault lies with you. When you tell me the issue is the product, I know you are not the right person for the job.
2. "The price is too high." The answer is simple. It is not about the price-it is about the value. Order takers and inexperienced sales professionals sell by price. Seasoned professionals sell by value. Determine your value and your differentiating attributes and sell on those, not the price. I see that Rolls Royce, Lamborghinis, and first class airline tickets are still selling, and in my books, those are expensive. They don't discount or complain about price. They sell the value of the product.
3. "I have no time for prospecting due to so much administration work." In this case, administration is a necessary evil. The best real estate people, trinkets and trash sales people, and life insurance people sell so well that they hire administrators to do their paper work so they can sell. When I hear that someone does not have time for prospecting, I remind them of the Ken Blanchard book *One Minute Salesperson* and suggest they read it. Make time. Plan better. Stop procrastinating. Focus on the job and stop complaining.
4. "The goals are too high." If the goals are too high, perhaps you need to discuss that at budget planning time and not at the end of the fiscal year. Seasoned professionals stay committed and create a sense of urgency with their potential customers. You need to have a plan that is based on reason and qualified, not a pie in the sky goal.
5. "The competitors are better." In this case, I always refer back to excuse number one. Then I try to analyse what differentiates our competition from us. What do they do better and what do we do better? I ask if perhaps

you are listening and "drinking the "Kool-Aid" from the competition's marketing and public relations programs. If so, where is your belief in your own product? If our product can be sold by other members of the team or organization, then the issue is not with the competition being better, just that we have the wrong sales person!

6. "We don't get enough support." My first response is "Have you spoken to your superior and asked for help? Or are you just looking for an excuse right now?" Perhaps what you are truly looking for is someone to do your work for you. Great salespeople have support staff. They earn it and pay for it. Those that complain are normally the ones who are not so great and need to find a reason for their failure to succeed.

These are the first six excuses and my responses (or at least thoughts!). Next, I will deliver the back end of the baker's dozen sales excuses that I never want to hear from a great salesperson. Though they are general sales excuses, they can be adapted to, and are very applicable to, sponsorship sales. As Todd Hockenberry noted in his list, "It is easy to allow your attitude to lapse into self-fulfilling negativity when you are a salesperson-after all there is a lot of rejection, difficult people, unreasonable customers, and other potentially challenging situations that you have to deal with." He goes on to say, "If you ever find yourself using any of these excuses it is time for a healthy injection of positive attitude because after all, these excuses are all comments made that reflect the salesperson's attitude."

Here are excuses seven through thirteen:

7. Quite often during "slumps," I hear a salesperson say, "No one is buying now." My read on this is that the salesperson has failed to create urgency and value for the prospect. Most companies have budget and will make decisions if shown value.
8. The other one recently from a sports organization was that they compared their product to a commodity. Similar to corn, oil, rocks, paper napkins, etc., they believed they were "just another amateur sport." In my opinion, even with the most basic products, great salespeople will create value and differentiation. Harvey McKay (public speaker and author of such great books as *Dig Your Well Before You Are Thirsty* and *Swim With The Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive*) sold envelopes. That was long before colored paper and the self-sticking fold. He sold envelopes. How the heck can you differentiate one #11 envelope from another? Harvey did and was extremely successful.
9. I also often hear that "I can't get an appointment." In my world, that means you have no rapport, trust, or initial communication value. It is simply that you are not interesting enough to talk to. So you need to present yourself in a light that people want to meet with you. Show them that you have something they want. Then you will get the appointment.

And trust me, you do have something they want or need; they just don't know it yet. And if you don't... why are you calling on them anyway?

10. "I can't get them to return my calls." See #9. Did you really give them a reason to call you back? When was the last time you called back a pollster or charity asking for money on your voice mail? You need to incite them to want to connect with you.
11. Then there is the excuse that it is someone else's fault. They claim: "Not enough people know about our products" or "We need to run more ads or do better marketing." Marketing and selling are two different things. My question to them is "Have you closed every single opportunity in front of you?" If not, don't worry about the marketing and more leads; close what you have in front of you now!
12. Then, of course, related to #11 is "All I need is more leads." You really don't need more than 10-20 active leads. When you have closed all those, you can have more. No one can effectively and efficiently manage more than 10-20 leads. You may have more prospects in the funnel, but the focus needs to be on active leads. As Todd said, "Cherry picking is not high level selling, be strategic, identify your best prospects and get to them by yourself, you cannot wait for them to find you."
13. And the big one..."It's not my job." When I hear that, I shudder. They claim that administration is someone else's job, or planning and implementation needs to be handled by someone else, or fulfillment is "not my responsibility," and so on. To me, this is someone who is probably better off behind a desk taking orders and passing them along, not a highly qualified sales professional who sells high value propositions that deliver results.

Sponsorship is about relationships and sales. If you do thorough discovery sessions, prospect correctly, and build proposals that work for the prospect, you will succeed in sponsorship sales. Failure to do these things will result in total failure. If you or your salespeople are using any of these 13 sales excuses, they should be red flags for you to address the issues as soon as possible.