

Profiling the consultive salesperson

 By Peter Gilbert

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In the second of my series on types of salespeople, the focus is the quadrant 2 (QII) consultive salesperson. Consultive salespeople are amongst the most difficult to find because it is a conceptual sale, focusing more on business outcomes or results, than product features and benefits. Unlike closers, consultive salespeople often move comfortably into management roles.

The consultive salesperson is required if a product is an advanced, high-tech "system" or business solution that must be integrated into the customer's present operation. These systems often replace older, established systems. They provide more cost effectiveness or expanded capacity.

Customers are typically inexperienced in the new technology. The purchase decision is complex, since it represents a change from current operations and involves multiple decision-makers who must decide on different feature and option alternatives. Customer needs include design assistance, basic use and benefit education, installation, employee user training, and service support throughout implementation.

Fulfilment approach (high-tech & high-touch):

Requirements	QII consultive solutions
Seller's company image	Expertise and competence; high-tech/state-of-the-art; serving leading companies
Lead generating methods	Offer free educational information; place bylined articles in professional journals; offer booklets, seminars, and how-to-manuals
Qualifying criteria	A lukewarm market; prospects value benefit but question supplier's method of accomplishing the benefit
New business presentations	Demonstrate initial concept to high level decision makers; educate customer in the basic concepts; offer case history support; provide a team to design a tailored solution; focus on growth opportunity or profit improvement
Solid answers to natural objections	objection: customers worry about interruption of operations; response: convince customer that improvement will be more than worth the trouble of interruptions
Closing techniques	Agree on a concept or pilot test; sign letters of agreement; develop project schedule agreeable to customer
Customer relations	Continue patient, one-on-one education; information mailings
Customer service	Design and install the system; train the customer's users; provide follow-up and system maintenance; track benefits to demonstrate; wisdom of the customer's decision; find areas for further improvement
Resale	Tend to be project-oriented; little chance to sell same product or service to same customer; sell expanded system or new products or additional services to other divisions; eventually change to relationship; Selling as internal customer; expertise develops

Sales force approach (high-tech & high-touch):

Requirements	QII consultive solutions
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Type of salesperson	Consultive
Traits & characteristics	Business oriented; career advancement driven; team “quarterback”; academic and conceptual overview; patient and tolerant of the inexperienced
Sales style	Technically expert; competent as a business or project manager; confident of the benefits
Sales focus	Educate and train customer; listen, uncover and resolve objections; supervise project; manage customer satisfaction
Role	Account team manager
Technical ability	Be technical expert
Training	Technical; application potential in the market; group presentations; consultive selling skills; project management
Length of time to close	Six months plus
Length of contact after close	Until product/system is working and customer sees benefits
Corporate support and structure	“extensive”; engineering; service; marketing; literature/presentations

ABOUT PETER GILBERT

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