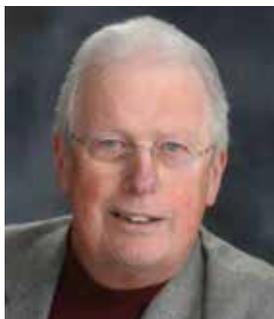


Sales Call Challenges

The steps toward solving two of the biggest obstacles reps face with customers



By Patrick T. Malone

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I recently attended a conference with a diverse group of distributor reps. During an informal session after dinner the subject of sales call challenges was raised and discussed. I thought it might be helpful to share our thoughts on a couple of those issues that seemed to present the greatest challenge to the group.

“How do I get past the gatekeeper?”

The mindset that a gatekeeper is someone to “get past” is the root of some of the problem here. I believe there are various levels of decision-makers within a practice, and each deserves the same level of respect that would be accorded to the owner.

Gatekeepers decide whether or not to grant access. These are generally the staff at the front desk.

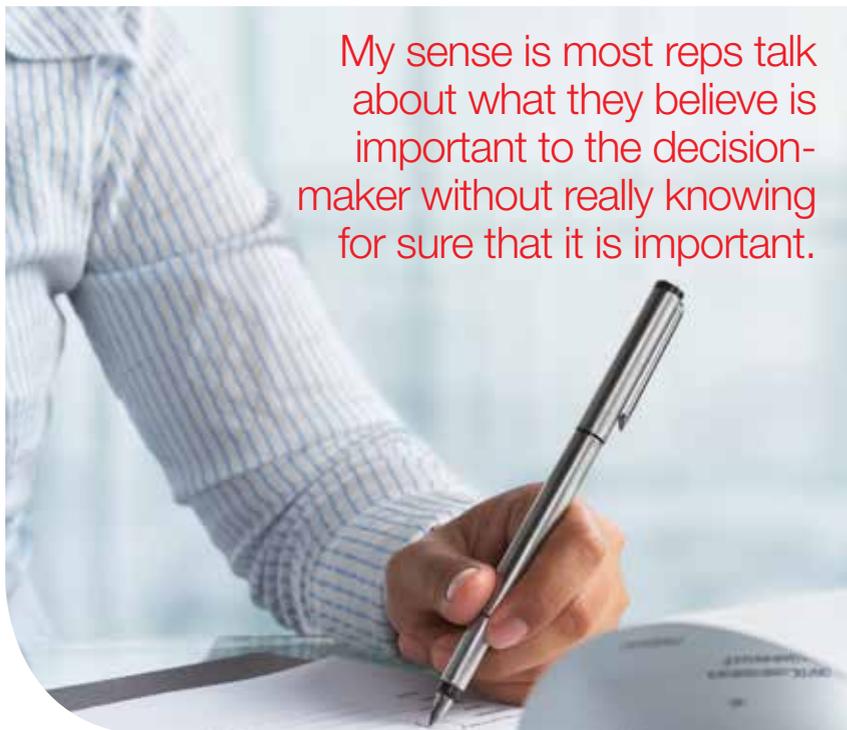
An influencer cannot decide “yes,” but they can suggest “no.” Even worse, they can sabotage the implementation in order to prove their suggested “no” was the appropriate response. These can be practice managers, technicians and/or associate veterinarians.

The owner is usually the ultimate decision-maker.

The experienced successful reps in the group talked about finding out what was important to the individual decision-makers and then mentioning that benefit in order to gain a positive decision. But that is not so easy. After all, what is important to the front desk personnel is likely different than what is important to the practice manager or the tech or the associate vet. All of that is likely different than what is important to the owner.

The answer involves some work to determine the values of all the decision-makers involved in making your sales call a success. The question remains: Is it worth the time and effort it takes to obtain all this information? The distributor reps that know what each decision-maker values are those who are the primary suppliers to those practices.

So if you want to be primary, stop trying to “get past” the gatekeeper



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and start ask more questions to determine what every decision-maker values.

“How do I differentiate myself and my company from others calling on the practice?”

My sense is most reps talk about what they believe is important to the decision-maker without really knowing for sure that it is important. Not every practice owner wants to grow their business. Some may want to maximize its sale value. Others may want to lighten their workload or maximize their bottom line.

Once again the experienced successful reps talked about building their territories to become the primary supplier by understanding the specific values of every decision maker. When they were on the outside looking in, the first question they asked was, “What do you like about your current distributor?” The answers to that question begin to paint that practice’s value picture.

The next question was “Is there anything you would like to have, that you are not getting out of your current relationship?” The answer adds targets of opportunity to the value portrait.

The final question “Are there any points of contention in your current relationship that you would like to change?” The answer here will describe the current pain points, and that is important because change only occurs when the pain of doing nothing exceeds the perceived pain associated with the change.

The answers to all three questions provide the successful distributor rep with the information necessary to construct a strategy to build a long and loyal relationship with her/his clients.

Start by addressing the pain points and finding out what the potential consequences are if those areas of contention are not fixed. Once the consequences reach the point of being intolerable, your solutions will seem like a snap. If there are no pain points, select the targets of opportunity to provide something they would like to have. In either case you will have an entry to prove you and your firm can provide everything they like and more. Over time you will have more and more of the business.

Certainly these two challenges only scratch the surface of the various challenges a distributor sales rep faces on a daily basis. So if you have a specific challenge you are struggling with, send us the information. We’ll select the most popular challenges for inclusion in future columns. ■



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