

Asking Smart Questions

Tips for Inside Sales

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I have a friend in the customer service business. He works for a cable Internet company in inside customer sales. Recently, we were having a phone conversation around lunch time about a personal issue. When another call came in, he laid down the cell phone, where he was on the call with me, and took the other call on his land line.

I got a chance to hear him in action. What I heard was disappointing. His first question after his opening greeting was this:

“How can I help you?”

I’ve heard him ask this before—so many times he doesn’t even hear himself. His tone is boring and impersonal, and his question rarely brings results.

Whatever your venue in sales, you can ask a much better question. It’s a question that:

- Gets prospects to tell you, up front, exactly what you need to say to help them buy.
- Helps you avoid meaningless features that actually create objections.
- Unlocks the potential to turn lookers into buyers.
- Causes customers to “sell themselves” because they have to visualize themselves already owning and using what they’re describing.



For CSRs in retail, it would be:

"Mr./Ms. Prospect, what brings you in today?"

On the phone:

"What interested you in _____?"

"Can you tell me what prompted your call?"

"What caught your eye in the ad/Web site/mail piece?"

"What caused your decision to look for _____?"

Listen to the first answer, and then follow up with more SPIN-type questions. (SPIN is another structured dialog that gets the client to create desire for your product.)

Remember, if someone takes the first step to proactively contact you, or visit you, it's for a reason. Why not find out precisely what that reason is?

Use a stronger, thought-provoking question for prospects who come in or call in. Stop saying the same thing over and over and start making the connection that leads the prospect to your solution.

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