

THE 4-P'S OF PROFESSIONAL SELLING

Neil Borden's concept of the Marketing Mix has been the recipe for marketing success for decades. This is sometimes referred to as the 4-P's: price, product, place, and promotion. Salespeople and their companies fit into the *place*—the channel or distribution of the product. This is good strategic marketing information for salespeople to have. Yet, salespeople have their own 4-P's model, which is a more tactical approach to sales success.

Personalization

This means that salespeople must customize their message to the buyer's needs and style. Consider this scenario: The sales rep spends 20 minutes listening to a customer tell him that he needs quick delivery and job-site training for his workers, but the rep turns a deaf ear to these needs and launches into a presentation about the breadth of name-brand products that his company sells. The contractor sends the rep packing because he failed to personalize his message to the buyer.

One goal of persuasion is to reduce the psychological distance between the sender and the receiver of information. Personalizing the communication is one way to do this. Your message must reflect the buyer's needs and the way the buyer prefers to make buying decisions. Customizing in this way makes it easier for the buyer to say "Yes," and isn't that the point?

Perceived Value

Perceived value excites buyers. It builds their anticipation and raises their expectations. A sales rep that knows his stuff builds the buyer's confidence that he is dealing with an expert. This is perceived value—the look and feel of things. When a salesperson invites a customer to tour his warehouse and meet the inside staff, it provides an opportunity to strut your stuff—to put your best foot forward. When a sales rep cleans up a proposal and adds a bit of color to increase its visual appeal, it catches the buyer's attention. This is the purpose of perceived value.

How your stuff looks when it arrives is perceived value. If your products arrive in a clean and professional looking package, it makes the buyer feel good about their buying decision. When your literature is crisp and fresh versus a dogged-ear copy of something that has sat in your trunk for three years, it creates greater anticipation in the buyer. When you show up for a sales call and you are dressed professionally, the buyer is reassured by your appearance.

Performance Value

Perceived value excites buyers; performance value satisfies them. In your presentation, you must demonstrate your performance value. Performance value is what the product and your service does for the buyer. If your tool improves productivity by reducing user fatigue, demonstrate this to the buyer. If your equipment is more energy efficient, show the customer the numbers. Buyers want performance. In fact, research shows that people in the United States define quality as product performance. Does your product perform at the level you promise? If so, demonstrate that to the buyer.

Performance value includes your performance as a salesperson. One sales rep told me that they had a 15-minute return call policy for their customers, 24 hours a day. If the customer calls, any time of day or night, someone will return that call within 15 minutes. The message is clear: we are always on call to serve. That's what I call performance!

Proof

I live in the Show-Me State, Missouri. People that grow up in these parts reflect the conservative, mid-western skepticism that begs for proof. We don't take anything at face value. We need proof. We like your perceived value—sizzle gets our attention. We are impressed by your personalizing and demonstrating your performance—you're building a good case. If you really want us to act, prove that you are that good. Show me.

Customer satisfaction surveys, warranties, third-party research, customer testimonials are a few ways that salespeople can prove their case. Innovation coach, Doug Hall, found in his research that adding proof to your feature-benefit chain improves your chances of success by 42%. See, I just added a proof source to support my argument.

Your customers can purchase the stuff you sell from dozens of places, including the Internet. What makes buying from you special? You have a much better chance of getting the business if you personalize your presentation, maximize your perceived value, demonstrate your performance value, and offer proof sources.

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