

Professional Sales Proposals

Professional Selling

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For many years, most of the business transactions in agriculture have been primarily based on an understanding of trust and confidence between the buyer and the seller.

Many producers can recall major business deals, sometimes involving large sums of money, that were confirmed by the seller giving his or her word, followed by a simple handshake.

Today, things have changed. In this age of complex technical solutions and increased fears of litigation, salespeople are required to put the details of their recommendations into writing and to develop professional sales proposals.

As Field Marketers put more of their product and service offerings into writing, what are some of the characteristics of a professional sales proposal? The following outlines a few of the essentials as offered by both agri-salespeople and the customers they serve.

Adjust to the customer's personal preferences: Bruce Miller, Loan Officer from York, PA., tells us, "Depending on their personality style, different people are going to want to

see proposals designed in different ways. "A DRIVER would be very comfortable seeing just an executive summary. The ANALYTICAL wants

to see that all the numbers are added correctly. (For these people, you might even include your adding machine tapes.) The AMIABLES want you to tell them why the proposal is good for them, and they want to have a friendly conversation about it. The EX-

PRESSIVES are interested in knowing enough about the proposal so they can hand it off to somebody else."

Carol Kemp, a financial services rep from Watertown, N.Y., adds, "My proposals are tailored to each customer and what I think he or she will be comfortable with. Some customers still believe in the handshake. In these cases, I don't want to overwhelm them with a complicated proposal."

Find out who else needs to be involved: G. Marvin Brown, a grower from Dover, Florida, tells us, "When a salesperson comes in with a new product that may benefit our operation or save us money, time or labor, if he has a short proposal to give me, I may stop him and say, 'Hey, I want



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to get a few of my key employees in on this conversation.'

"I will then bring in the farm managers and maybe the foreman. We'll all take a look at the proposal at the same time. Or, I may ask the salesperson to meet me at the farm instead of at the office where we can get some of the employees who use the product to take a look at what he has to offer."

Brown continues, "Make sure you have enough information to supply five or six people. Multiple people make decisions quite often on my farm. So, be prepared."

Bruce Miller adds, "Make sure the decision-maker is there as well as the person

who might question the decision. If it's the husband who decides on the purchase, you need to have his wife there. Make sure all the partners and key buying influencers are involved."



G. Marvin Brown, Dover, Florida
"More is not better."

Tie solutions to the prospect's needs: Miller continues, "Build your proposal around specific facts gathered during the sales process. Highlight what the needs were and

present your recommendation in a way that matches those needs."

Keep your proposal short and to the point: Brown tells us, "Oftentimes we'll have people come in with pages and pages in their proposal. I don't have time to go through all of that. I want salespeople to show me one or two sheets of paper and then say, 'I have summarized what I think will be of benefit to your farming operation. I have condensed it to a little bit of reading. If you want to follow up with more detail, I have additional information on this product and will be glad to show it to you.'"

"That person, in my opinion, has really done a good job. More is not better."

The importance of putting things in writing

As agriculture gets more complex and our product and service solutions become more technical, it's becoming increasingly important to put our sales proposals in writing.



Mark Rogers, dairy producer from Dearing, Georgia, tells us, "It's important to have down what's involved in your

sale. Put your proposal in writing. Then, there will be no surprises down the road if there are any problems.

"Otherwise, I might say, 'I remember you told me such-in-such would be in there.' But now you tell me, 'Well, I told you it *could* be in there, but that would be extra.' Then I say, 'No, you told me it *would* be in there, but now the product shows up, and it's not in there.'"

"When this happens, I feel like I bought a 'pig in a poke.' This is an old Southern saying which means, I bought something different from what I thought I was buying.

"Unless it's in writing, my reality may be different from

your reality. It's all a matter of perspective. Nobody is trying to cheat anyone. We just have different understandings of what was to be included in the sale."

Rogers concludes by noting, "Sometimes it's also important to specify availability and pricing if it's a product vital to my operation.

"I've had some products that change in availability and pricing on a weekly basis. So, make sure you say, 'Look, you can get this product at this time, at this price. But next week it might be different.' Be sure to let me know if the price or availability is subject to change on a rapid basis."