Collaboration Selling™ with SmartFunnel®   *Whitepaper*

Collaboration Selling is built into SmartFunnel, supporting better (insight-based) sales dialog, saving time, making coaching easier for Sales leaders, selling more with less frustration, and enabling more accurate Sales forecasting. The method has been proven to work extremely well in B2B solution sales.

A central concept in Collaboration Selling is that customer champions usually "peg" vendors as people who offer "products" only, and consider competition as something based on comparing products and vendors. This leads to time available for sales conversation often spent on product and pricing details which, sadly, many sales people will accept and encourage.

Meanwhile a typical customer champion underestimates the power of internal competition in the customer organization, which exists at multiple levels, in terms of problems to solve, how they can be solved or survived, and the priorities and urgency of diverse problems and opportunities. The senior executive buyer usually chooses the business improvement option with the best internal action proposal - not necessarily the best product. Thinking about how this happens for your business, and your products, leads to an understanding of the "end game" for how you will win or lose when it comes time to cross the goal line.

Are you experiencing any of these common sales problems?

- Stalled deals

- Projects shelved until "next budget year"

- Internal Sales team resources wasted on proposals which do not get approval

- Requests for discounting in order to close

- Losing to the status quo

- Losing to competitors

Assume that in 80% of these cases the customer champion did not have a strong internal proposal - your vendor proposal may be great, but the way it is presented internally at the buyer organization may not win against internal competition.

The Collaboration Selling method helps your champion prepare and deliver a strong internal proposal for your solution. The method is consistent with what is taught by most sales gurus and sales trainers.

SmartFunnel guides the sales person to a pattern of discussing certain topics and writing the results down. This builds an internal proposal for the champion, in stages, which creates influence for the seller. The method helps gets all stakeholders identified and on board, and creates a preferred consultative role for you - gaining immense credibility for you and your company.

It starts with each sales Rep learning to deflect customer requests for product, price and configuration info, and direct attention to the needs of the customer business, with a focus on the four elements considered key to all decisions. In fact, the sales person is also motivated by the knowledge that he/she must provide leadership in the customer dialog, as buyers appreciate receiving new ideas and insights.

The 4 elements of project approval or rejection, common to most significant B2B acquisitions, are defined as selling stages within SmartFunnel:

Purpose   Does the investment support a key business need, or set of needs?

Payback   Does it give us a financial reward commensurate with the investment?

Time Drivers   Does the timing have urgency to support our other resource allocations?

Proposal Fit   Does the offered solution fit well to solve the problem(s) defined?

Importantly, for B2B proposals which do NOT get approved, one or more of the above four elements is usually the reason for non-approval. Successful sales Reps prepare for the final executive approval from the beginning, working with their champion to co-author and document an internal proposal. They follow a process using customized sales templates, building the Proposal in stages as a Project Outline, guided by the SmartFunnel system and stages of progress. This puts the pins in place to have the customer team ready to buy, making the champion look good, and winning the final approval.

We call it "winning the end game" and that is the goal of Collaboration Selling.

User techniques for SmartFunnel's Collaboration Selling:

Sales approach - To help the customer become a buyer, and plan for the end game, guide the customer conversation toward picking up info on the first 3 key closing elements (Purpose, Payback, Time). Take notes as usual, and probe further into potential high payback areas of the opportunity. Knowing that you wish to collaborate in making a project plan with the customer, look for an opportunity to propose this, as a way to prepare a more effective proposal. Then pop the question "…Harry, this is really interesting! I have notes on your purposes, payback expected, and timing issues. May I help you create a project outline for this business opportunity?"

Do not wait until the end of a meeting to pop the question - do this about 60% of the way into a meeting, leaving time for a non-rushed customer response. Most of the time, your prospects will say "yes, that is a great idea!" Then the remaining time you have for further discussion will prove very valuable, as prospects shift their attention to business planning issues. They may even name other key decision makers you should meet. You are becoming a partner, not a product peddler.

Be sure to close with a specific agreement on next meeting time, or better still a series of three meetings (telephone or video calls are fine) to cover the first 3 elements of the plan.

Then prepare the brief summary of Purposes and send it to the customer, asking for his/her corrections and edits. Your custom project collaboration is now underway.

Your Progress in SmartFunnel can now be updated to Purpose = "Med". When the customer responds with agreement or corrections, this can be upgraded to "Hi".

It is best to avoid putting progress into SFUN for the other stages yet - otherwise Reps will have most of their Deals showing "Lo" for each stage of every Deal. The following stage is best left at "none" for progress, until you have completed a customer collab document for the current stage. To be more effective, all documents should be short (1 or 2 pages). Keep it simple. The stage documents will eventually be rolled up to become a powerful Executive Summary for your final proposal.

Resource Efficiency - Internal resources can be used more efficiently when the "Purposes" of a project are well defined. In addition, if the customer cannot identify "Paybacks" or other benefit estimates, or if benefit estimates are low - the Rep should take an off ramp, i.e. advise the customer that you can probably not make a suitable proposal. This can also save a lot of time, by not having scarce internal resources work on proposals that do not have strong support, and are unlikely to close.

Sign Dates estimates - Reps are encouraged to enter an estimated sign date as soon as a Deal is qualified as a real opportunity. Later, once you have progressed with your project plan, there will come a day when you have customer agreement to the Collab Doc, including Sign Dates that are defined. Then, in SmartFunnel you may turn on the flag that says "Sign Date Conf" (Confirmed). Within the Deal list, Sign Dates are color-coded - yellow if within 30 days, and red if stale-dated (in the past).

Visual Dashboard - Basic Functions - A Visual dashboard appears at the top of an Open Deals list. There is a Time Chart and a Quality Chart, and the list itself can be sorted and filtered.

The Time Chart shows a count and amount of Deals with Sign dates in the next 4 months, as a 30-60-90 day outlook. Remember, this kind of info is valuable to the Sales Manager and all Senior Executives, for planning resources in the whole company, so looking closely at any soon-to-close Deals will be wise, to get ready for inevitable management inquiries.

The Quality Chart shows a summary of Progress scores in your whole funnel, and is designed to give a visual alert on stages where you are strong, or not in a strong position. For example, it is common for an individual rep to have lower scores on either Payback or Time Drivers than on Purposes, since customer questioning is tougher on these two key topics, to draw out key hidden info, and build specific and customer-relevant benefit claims. Make the effort; use your selling skills to ask more questions, get more business background and frame the issues in a stronger light.

The columns for Deal Progress stages (1 2 3 4 5) allow you to see Deals that need attention at a glance, once you become familiar with the brief headings and symbols. For example, sort by Sign Date and then look at the Deals expected to close within 3 months - then examine how many of them you have given a score of "Hi" on time drivers (stage 3). Those which are not rated Hi on this element probably need attention, and you should not be attempting to close them too early.

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