

Convincing decision-makers that you're on the same page

or: What does a salesperson say to a 250-pound HiPPO in the room?

Have you ever watched and listened to two different people giving completely disparate driving directions to someone? It can be quite comical, especially when it results in a heated debate. But the *really* funny thing is, their objectives are identical. Presumably, they both want the recipient of their advice—the driver—to get to their desired destination as quickly and safely as possible.

Does this scenario ring familiar in any way to *you*—the salesperson or marketing pro? Your goal is to facilitate greater success for your prospect or client—a concept that they surely embrace—but you may be at odds as to how to get there. In those instances, there may be a HiPPO in the room. That's an acronym for "Highest-Paid Person with an Opinion." This may seem like a delicate, make or break moment as you approach that critical decision-making spot in the sales funnel. You've made it to the person who can pull the pin on the deal or show you to the door...and you don't want to blow it.

Measured Approach

So, obviously, this is where a bit of diplomacy comes in, but it will ultimately do you *and* the client no good at all if you simply concede and become a "yes man" or "yes gal." Now's the time to employ a little "animal husbandry" with that HiPPO you're staring down. Reassure him that your vision for success is identical to his own, share some evidence of the success your strategies have provided previous clients, and suggest setting up a comparative test between the company's existing approach to Sales & Marketing and your own.

At this juncture, it's likely that you're facing either one of two scenarios:

- a. Either your customer has already engaged a content marketing system, but it's being poorly executed and results are lagging, or
- b. They have yet to employ a content marketing strategy at all.

So you're looking at some fine-tuning or a full-scale deployment.

Fine-tuning

Believe it or not, this scenario may require a little more diplomatic finesse than if you were just starting from scratch. Your client has already engaged content marketing, perhaps at your behest, and you find yourself in the position of having to critique and possibly alter it. Tread lightly, but point out where you feel that their messaging has gone off-point or when it's not being deployed at the most optimum times in the Sales & Marketing cycle.

Nominal changes can probably be implemented without too much trouble or drama. Big changes, however, may require a bit more discussion, but *will* ultimately reveal that you know what you're talking about with even greater clarity.

Compare & Contrast

If the problems you've detected in a client's content marketing is clearly endemic and not an isolated incident, suggest doing an A/B test. In other words, alternate their existing content with an improved, updated iteration of your own. For example, have them send their email blast or newsletter to half their

subscriber base, and your version to the other half. Obviously, the larger the pool of recipients, the more likely you will be to get accurate results. Of course there's no guarantee that the division of subscribers might not be accidentally tilted one way or another based on past behaviors, but those are the chances we take every day, right?

If you're finding fault with more extensive content-oriented initiatives, such as white papers or case studies, polish a couple of those up and have your client alternate their distribution with every other successful customer call-to-action. Results evidenced by this measure may not be as instantaneous, but keep track of the response the separate documents engender.

Of course, the problems you diagnose may not be limited to semantics in a newsletter or blog post. You may feel that a whole different approach is required in a specific instance. For an example, if a video would be more effective than a written piece, the A/B comparison may be a lot more dramatic.

New Deployment

Here's where you'll really have a chance to prove your mettle. Convince the client to allow you to set up a test case study. Whether you offer this measure at a discount or roll it into a larger, extended deal based on successful results is up to you. Do what's comfortable and whatever you think will work best toward your end goal of closing a longer-term contract.

Start populating the business website with some short, sweet, but valuable resources. Begin rolling out blog posts that link to the site to the existing mailing list. If the company has an extended sales force, ask the client for a dedicated member of that team with whom you can work exclusively throughout this test. Don't draft the top producer, get one from the middle of the pack. You don't want the reasons for improved results to be ambiguous. Show this salesperson how to track the traffic on the site that's been generated. Give him a quick Twitter lesson. Explain the "no-sell" concept, how the sales funnel works in a solid content marketing strategy, and when to deploy further resources and, ultimately, reach out to the customer.

It won't take long to have an excited salesperson on your hands, with a sales manager—or HiPPO—right on his other heels. In business, some days you've gotta slay the dragon. But on others, you must simply soothe the HiPPO!