Accelerating Sales with Interactive Online Presentations

How can an online presentation be more effective than a face-to-face customer meeting? Newly emerging interactive online presentations are successfully challenging the assumptions that “face-time” and “pressing the flesh” are the most significant events in selling to businesses.

Interactive presentation technology offers sales energizers even more powerful than eye contact or a view of audience body language. When a presentation has true interactive capabilities, every audience member participates in modifying and customizing information as it unfolds onscreen. In this way, attendees and presenters alike become contributors to a decision process that records agreement for specific follow-on actions. This change results in shorter sales cycles and higher order rates.

The Meaning of “Interactive” in Selling Online

The key word in driving sales through technology is “interactive”. In the new world of online presentations, interactive means much more than soliciting verbal feedback, or asking audience members to raise their hands for a straw poll to gage interest. For a sales presentation to leverage the power of Internet interactivity, audience feedback must actively adjust or enhance presented material to develop a consensus between customer and vendor. When a sales presentation contains that consensus it becomes an actual application to drive follow-on sales operations.

For sales professionals to close business they must ultimately penetrate a customer decision process that merges their product or service with the opinions and needs of all customer stakeholders. Whether decisions are formally structured or occur through a series of random events, successful sales normally require multiple meetings with multiple decision makers, including an advocate or so-called “inside champion.”

Usually a series of presentations—typically PowerPoint™ presentations—focus the decisions that lead to sales. Vendor representatives must pass through numerous levels and functions to build interest within a customer organization, and gain agreement through all decision criteria. As sales people work their way through this process, their presentation typically changes as each new audience indicates its priorities, opinions, needs and objections. This process can sometimes be completed in only a few days, though it commonly take several months to for a salesperson touch all bases in the customer process. Through interactive online presentations, salespeople accelerate this process, rapidly focus on a winning strategy, and close business while customer enthusiasm continues to build.

Making Online Sales Presentations Interactive
Traditional sales presentations are predominantly one-way speeches, accompanied by projected slides to enhance vendor credibility, describe products or services, and emphasize benefits. Usually the information is generalized, because vendors seldom have enough detail about customer issues and needs to be specific. Salespeople may never know if a portion of the information is irrelevant or uninteresting to their audience. Silent participants may become unidentified obstacles to sales, if they disagree with the general message, misunderstand the vendor’s offerings, or object to a myriad of details.

The most positive outcome of most presentations is an opportunity to schedule a follow-up presentation, incorporating feedback that brings the next version closer to the needs of the next audience in the sales cycle.

Interactive online presentations are entirely different. Though they might begin with similar material, the presentation itself becomes smarter and more valuable to participants as they add input onscreen. For example, an early slide may offer a list of items that the presenter tentatively plans to cover, and then permit audience members to check their highest priority items onscreen. The system then aggregates audience inputs, applies voting logic, rebuilds the remainder of the presentation, and focuses it to audience choices.

A more subtle approach to customizing the presentation may be to pose interactive questions regarding business goals, schedules, budgets, or virtually anything else that might determine the best material for presentation. Here too, the system can apply logic to choose the best slides for discussion and queue them appropriately to maximize value and impact.

Even when a presentation contains the most appropriate slides, it must also include customer-specific information for customers to consider it as part of their decision process. Interactive slides provide a vehicle to gather that information, record it in a database, and focus sales efforts that directly speak to customer needs.

A Simple-But-Powerful Sales Example

Online presentation slides of a large financial services company illustrate the role of interactive slides in their sales process. During an online presentation, a financial advisor from this firm proposes various potential home loan programs from which a customer must choose. After explaining each program in general terms, the presenter needs specific information to compare the financial effect of each potential loan program for a customer attending the online presentation. In this one-on-one personal online presentation the advisor displays an interactive slide that permits the customer to quickly determine the monthly payment required by each program.

Using a mouse to adjust onscreen scales, the customer defines a requested loan amount, an interest rate, and various terms, enabling the system to instantly calculate and the required monthly payment within the onscreen slide. By entering information choices that compare three different programs side-by-side, the
customer can readily understand the financial differences between them, and choose the program that best fits his or her needs.

### Mortgage Payment Comparison

Move the slider to select the amount to be financed:

![Slider with $580,000 selected]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM ONE:</th>
<th>PROGRAM TWO:</th>
<th>PROGRAM THREE:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Select Interest Rate:</td>
<td>Select Interest Rate:</td>
<td>Select Interest Rate:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>5.25%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amortization Period:</td>
<td>Amortization Period:</td>
<td>Amortization Period:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Yr</td>
<td>15 Yr</td>
<td>Int. Only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payment: $3,293.18</td>
<td>Payment: $4,662.49</td>
<td>Payment: $2,175.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To complete the interaction, the data represented on the slide becomes a permanent record in a database, and can later become part of the eventual mortgage contract. To meet regulatory compliance requirements, the system also prints a report for transmittal to the prospective customer, documenting the terms discussed during the presentation.

This financial sales application of course requires additional interactive information to be requested by the financial advisor and entered by the customer. Each required interactive step includes slides that make the customer’s response easy and straightforward. For example, all prospective clients must determine how large a loan to request, based on income, assets and other factors. The advisor can prompt them to enter information like this into labeled boxes within an interactive slide onscreen, or customers can add information by clicking Yes/No buttons, or multiple-choice responses. Bringing this information into the presentation itself permits it to be stored and processed instantly, and positions the financial advisor to focus on realistic numbers submitted by customers themselves.
By injecting interactivity in this way, the financial services company has transformed a traditional PowerPoint™ presentation into a high-value application that speeds the selling process and helps to close more business. The outcome of the presentation is more effective than the traditional result in several ways:

- Interactive customers gain clear understanding by participating in a supportive, collaborative environment
- Sales people maintain momentum by eliminating the tedious, time-wasting manual steps traditionally required during discussions of this kind
- The system automatically documents all customer-specific information, writes it into documents, and speeds it to the customer for final approval
- Written records create automatic compliance with regulatory guidelines

**Interactive Sales Presentations in Complex Environments**

In a more complex scenario, an enterprise software vendor regularly presents to department heads within large customer companies before progressing to proposal development. In a typical presentation of this kind, the sales person has multiple objectives.

The primary objectives are to explain the vendor’s product and to focus on benefits. In addition however, the product may be configured many different ways, and has multiple options, each carrying an added price-per-seat. The salesperson must therefore determine the importance of each option and find the best way to fit an enterprise solution expense into the budget of each department that decides to become a user. Salespeople also use this presentation to determine the number of participating seats in each department, and the solution’s value as measured by each department head.

To meet all of these objectives, the presentation begins with a product overview, and then focuses on the hot buttons of each department head-participant. To interactively gather vital sales knowledge regarding each department’s needs, an interactive slide requests feedback on degree of importance of each of five perceived objectives: cost savings, customer satisfaction, forecast data, ease of employee training, and accurate updated information.

Understanding which potential objectives are most important in each department, the salesperson can refine sales strategy throughout the presentation by emphasizing the most relevant benefits. Equally important, recorded knowledge of opinions and needs of each decision maker later drives compelling and relevant sales proposals.
As the presentation progresses, participants add other kinds of information to shape an eventual proposal and purchase order. As they understand the vendor’s capabilities and measure applicability to their departments, they can determine and input the numbers of seats they would use, which optional features would be valuable, and which features need further discussion or investigation.

At the conclusion of this interactive presentation, all department head-participants have guided the sales presenter to the material that they needed to discuss, while effectively eliminating unnecessary subject matter that the presenter might otherwise have included. By responding through interactive slide inputs, they have provided vital information enabling the sales person to immediately create a proposal that correctly sizes, prices and specifies what the customer will order.

What Other Information Comes from Interactive Presentation Slides?

In addition to these two examples, online presenters benefit from interactive inputs in numerous other ways. By adding interactivity to online presentations, they transform a one-way lecture-style presentation into an audience directed discussion. The range of information collected as part of an interactive presentation may help a
salesperson understand an audience’s business motivations and to rank the relative importance of various business drivers.

Once a customer audience is willing to discuss a problem to be solved, interactive slides can request and record specifics needed to propose solutions. Further into a sales process, a salesperson presenting interactively can record details such as order size or specific options needed to create an eventual order.

When selling to a group with a range of opinions, recording interactive feedback permits all participants to rank preferences such as color, style, and delivery requirements. Positioning the results of opinion variations onscreen can also assist customer group consensus, creating agreement across a multi-functional decision process.

The Overall Impact on Sales

Interactive sales presentations online potentially represent far more than new sales tools. By creating presentations that gracefully collect information as a part of audience participation, salespeople effectively merge presentations into mainstream business applications. This change means shorter sales cycles and higher order rates.

Equally significant is a subtle yet powerful shift in the salesperson’s positioning in the customer environment. By changing the traditional sales presentation from a one-way pitch to an interactive planning session, salespeople become an integral part of the customer decision process itself. In this way, interactive presentations may permanently change the way sales are made in any complex industry environment.