“I am Not Interested”
Dealing with Knee Jerk Objections
By Jim Domanski

Nothing, absolutely nothing, cuts a conversation shorter with a prospect than a brusque, “I am not interested.”

The selling arena across North America lies littered with “dead and wounded” sales reps that were slashed by these four words. Knowing how to how to respond to this objection can make your sales life a whole lot easier.

Why Are They Not Interested

When a prospect says, “I am not interested” (IANI) do they really mean it? Perhaps in some cases this is true but what prospects really might be saying is:

“I might be interested ... but I have been inundated with sales reps who have wasted my time and I suspect you are yet another ... so, I am not interested now!” or,

“I might be interested ... but I have something more pressing on my plate and I don’t want to be bothered right now... so I am not interested now.” or

“I might be interested ... but I am getting ready for vacation and I want to be out of here by 2:00 ... so I am not interested now.” Or

“I might be interested ... but on my own terms... so I am not interested now.”

The IANI objection is not so much that they are not interested but rather that you caught them off guard and they are not prepared for your unsolicited call. Their objection is not grounded in anything real or rational. Their objection is a “knee jerk” reaction which means it is automatic or spontaneous; an automatic reflex brought on by your unsolicited call.

By way of comparison, think of the times you have been to a retail store and a sales clerk comes up to you and asks “May I help you today?” The vast majority of us automatically respond by saying, “No thanks, just looking.”
Why? Because we don’t want our space invaded; we are not ready for a pitch; we don’t want to be sold. The same holds true for the unsolicited calls you make.

And the trouble is: we as sales reps tend to reward our prospects by murmuring an apology and hanging up. Prospects have learned that the IANI objection is a fast, easy and highly effective way to brush you off and if you continue to reward them, your days in sales will be agonizing.

What Not Say

Of course, not every sales rep gives up so easily. A few manage rebuttals like:

“How can you say you are not interested when you haven’t heard what I have to say?" or

“What are you not interested in?" or

“Fine. If you don’t want to save money it’s up to you!”

While these remarks may make YOU feel good for a moment or two, they won’t do a thing for the prospect. Let’s face it, they are confrontational. You might win the verbal battle but you lose all opportunity to sell. These statements do nothing for you except annoy the prospect. They will either give you an earful or hang up; probably both. They don’t work. Don’t use them.

What to Say

Assuming you have a decent opening statement and it is delivered well, here is an extremely effective template that you can use with some minor tinkering. There are several examples to illustrate the point. Suppose you sell to IT directors, your reply to the objection might look like this:

“Oh, I am sorry. I was given to understand that you were the person in charge of reducing IT costs and ensuring software compliance. Can you tell me who I should speak to?”

Suppose you sell safety or health programs to manufacturers and distributors:
“Oh, I am very sorry Mr. Jones. I was given to understand that you were the person in charge of reducing death and injury on the job site. Can you please tell me who I should speak to?”

Suppose you are speaking with an office manager in a professional office:

“Oh, I am sorry to bother you. I was given to understand that you were the person in charge of reducing operating costs and improving efficiencies. Could you tell me who I should be speaking to?”

Why it Works

This reply is absolutely and positively brilliant and ingenious because it is rich in psychology. The reply works extremely well because it subtly and politely shames the prospect. It indirectly reminds the prospect that one of their key responsibilities is to reduce costs, or eliminate injuries or improve efficiencies or minimize risk or whatever the benefit might be. The reply suggests and hints and alludes to the fact that they are shirking their responsibilities. It’s a wake up call and you delivered it. Powerful stuff, here!

Because your reply implies that you are talking to the wrong person, it doesn’t look or sound like you are chastising the prospect. It sounds like you made a genuine mistake and that you are sorry for interrupting but you would like to find the person who IS responsible for these major benefits. In effect, it looks as though you blew it … rather than the prospect.

Dozens of sales reps who have used this technique have reported to me that the prospect typically murmurs something like, “Ah…er…what’s this about?” When that happens, you have won. It doesn’t mean you will get a sale but it does mean you can move further into the sales call.

Delivery

NOTE: The words are clever and compelling but what really will make this response work for you is your delivery and the tone of your voice. When you apologize, your tone must be sincere. You must sound like you too were caught off guard. Butter must melt in your mouth when you ask for the “correct” decision maker. In effect, you are in the spotlight and you must deliver your lines well. If you don’t, you can sound sarcastic and flippant. Needless to say,
the response will then back fire.

What this really means is that you must practice your lines. Practice being sincere and contrite. Have some fun, practice a little quiver in your voice. Practice pausing and sounding like you were caught unaware. Practice. Practice is what makes this work.

Summary

Of course, there will always be prospects who will simply hang up after uttering IANI objection. There will be others who listen to your reply and hang up regardless. So it goes. The point is this technique will salvage some prospects. It will temper their knee jerk objection and give you another opportunity to sell. Finally, ask yourself this: what is the worst that can happen? The prospect can hang up on you but he or she was going to do that anyway. So give it a try and let me know how it goes.

Since 1991, Jim Domanski is the President of Teleconcepts Consulting Inc. and works with companies and individuals who are frustrated with the results they have been getting when using the telephone to generate leads and sales. For more information visit: www.teleconceptsconsulting.com or call 613 591 1998.

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