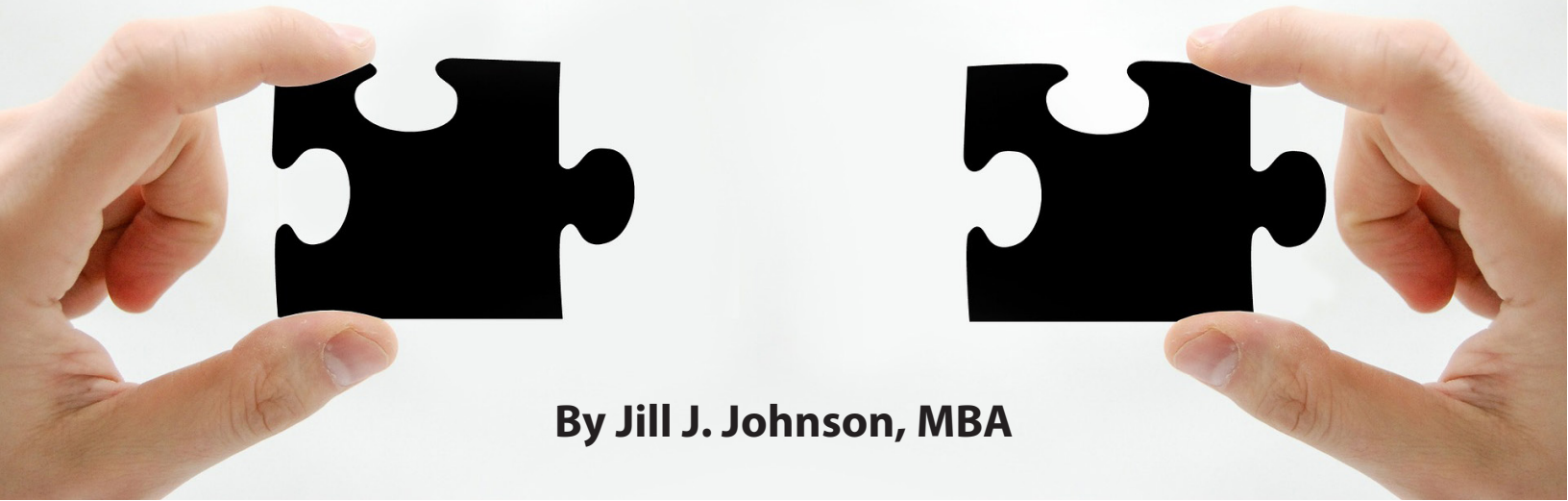


Matching Your Sales Approach to Your Prospect's Readiness to Buy



By Jill J. Johnson, MBA

Your sales and promotional messages must link to where your customers are in their decision-making process. There are five stages of buying behavior that a consumer will go through: awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and finally the adoption stage. Each stage requires a different decision by your prospect. By matching your sales and promotional strategies to their decision focus at each stage in the buying process, you can more effectively shift them closer to their final decision.

Awareness Stage: In this stage, your prospect perceives they have a problem or need to be addressed. They often have limited insight about their options for dealing with their issue. The objective is to provide your prospect with basic information. Consider the information you need to tee up to establish the framework for their thinking. Don't overwhelm them at this stage by giving them every single bit of information you have available. Think about what they need to understand by providing your prospects with high-level information about your products and services. Shape how you want them to think about getting their needs met. Help them gain confidence in their basic understanding.

Your call to action should be engaging your prospect in a next step such as signing up for your mailing list, calling you directly or setting up a meeting with you for lunch, coffee or Zoom meeting. If they're at a point where they are aware of you, they are ready for you to establish the basis of their understanding of the information and why they should look at you further.

Interest Stage: By now, your prospect is curious about what you can offer to meet their needs. They have a basic level of understanding about their overall options for addressing their issue. Provide them with more details on the specific options or choices you offer. Your prospects will be evaluating how your products and services will meet their needs. Consider the objections they might have at this state which prevent you from closing the sale. Shape your messaging to frame their thinking about these key objections. Help them gain confidence in understanding your pricing, quality, value and other benefits or features. Match the value of your offerings to showcase where you fit relative to your competitive alternatives.

Your call to action is to build trust with your prospect so they will provide you with more detail about their specific situation to enable you to address their unique concerns. Make sure your promotional messages at this stage give them confidence to continue considering you as an option. If they are interested, you have a prime opportunity to establish the framework for how your prospect should evaluate the information they receive from your competitors.

Evaluation Stage: In this stage, your prospect has more insight about their options for addressing their issue. Provide them with detailed information on your features and benefits. Be specific in establishing your uniqueness in meeting your prospect's need in their top decision factors. Your prospect is seriously considering your products and services. They have likely narrowed it down to two or three options and are going back and forth from you to your competition. Help them gain confidence in their choice by matching their decision criteria to your options.

Your call to action is to get your prospect to move forward and engage in a deeper sales dynamic. Now you can focus on making a major ask – such as giving a presentation to their decision team or asking to submit a customized proposal to respond to their specific concerns. If they are at a point where they are evaluating you, they are very close to making a decision. Clearly establish how you can meet their need within their budget in their time frame. If they are evaluating you, your prospect has narrowed their options and is looking for ways to eliminate other vendors from consideration.

Trial Stage: Your prospect now has narrowed down their options and is testing to see if you are actually able to meet their need. Your objective should be to provide them with the final insight they need to have the confidence to select you. By now your prospect has eliminated most or all of the competitive alternatives and they are nearly ready to buy. Address any unique questions holding them back from approving the sale. You must now prove that what you said in your promotional materials matches the experience they will have with you.

Your call to action is to ask for the final sales confirmation or the signed contract. You have fully engaged with your prospect and they are now confirming that you are their best choice. In the Trial Stage, you are at the make or break point. Help them confirm that you are their best choice by ensuring you manage their customer experience. Make sure your team is ready to produce service delivery and the prospect experience matches the expectations you established. Showcasing your ability to deliver what they need or want is essential to closing the sale.

Adoption Stage: Now your customer finally has chosen you and you should be ready to fully deliver on all of your promises and successfully integrate your prospect into your satisfied customer base. Your prospect is now a paying customer. Identify any additional issues they have that you may be able to address going forward.

Your call to action is to ensure you and your team provide a high level of satisfaction with the sale. Build deeper ties with your customers and make sure you consistently deliver a superior experience. Manage the customer on-boarding process by delivering what you promised so they become your advocates.

Final Thoughts: By using the five stages of buying behavior, as a sales framework you can maximize your opportunity to provide your prospect with exactly the type of information they need and minimize any wasted sales effort on your part. This focused approach will allow you to customize your sales and promotional strategies to offer your prospect exactly what they need so they become long-term customers.



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