



Getting into the Buyer's Shoes: Buying Online Solutions

By Charlie Lang, Executive Coach & Trainer @ Progress-U Limited

Buying Online

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The story

A few weeks ago, I met Chris* at a networking event. We chatted about what his company was doing and what my business was all about. He quickly realized that his company's online solutions could be beneficial for us and said, "Charlie, we should really meet soon so that I can show you our solutions that can lead you to more business." We had fairly good rapport and my company was then currently considering improvements to our online approach, so I was willing to respond to his suggestion.

A few days later, Chris called me and we set a meeting. During the meeting, he showed me a brochure with all his company's solutions and kept asking whether this or that solution would be of interest to me.

We finally nailed down one area of immediate interest and three areas for future consideration out of the list of around 10 solutions. Then I asked a few technical questions that Chris could only partially answer, so he suggested that I meet one of their software engineers for further clarifications. This was fine with me, especially because the engineer provided me with more satisfactory answers.

Before I left, Chris promised to send me a quote for the more immediate requirement, including some of the options that were briefly mentioned by the engineer. I received the proposal a couple of days later, and after a few more days, Chris called me to check if I received the quote and if everything was clear.

Let's see which aspects of Chris's approach are in line with the "Stop Selling!" approach, and then I'll discuss what a person with the "Stop Selling!" mindset would have done differently:

In line with "Stop Selling!"

The responsiveness and reliability that Chris displayed was perfectly fine and gave me, his potential buyer, the feeling that his is a credible, trustworthy company.

Even if Chris did not have full technical competence, it was not an issue for me as a buyer - I appreciated his efforts in having the engineer answer my questions. Furthermore, the situation assured me that in future dealings, he wouldn't suggest solutions unsuited to my expectations, and that he would understand my expectations in the first place.

The way I was received at his office was very welcoming and certainly immediately improved the already existing good rapport - an important basis for building trust.

What I would have done differently

It actually started at the networking event. As a potential buyer, I found it way too premature for Chris to claim that his company's solutions will lead my company to more business. If he would have shared that his company's solutions helped other companies similar to mine, it would have been much more attractive and believable to me.

Also, instead of saying "can show you our solutions", I would have preferred if he said something like "I would like to discuss with you what you are doing today and what your potential is for more online business in the future." This way, he would have focused on my interests (potentially more business) as opposed to his (their solutions that he wanted to sell).

During our meeting, Chris immediately presented his company brochure with his company's products to see whether any of them would interest me. I would have preferred if he asked about my business first and what kind of online solutions we already had in place. He could have helped me discover which aspects of my current solutions work for me and which aspects create difficulties. Also, we could have developed a vision for my online business for the next couple of years and then together work out a plan on how to get there. His company's products could have been tools to make this plan a reality, and if they turned out unsuitable or insufficient, I would have been grateful for his suggestions on who else could help complement their solutions. As a next step, we could have discussed how to create the cash flow from the online business to pay for the necessary - perhaps high-cost - tools. Eventually, it could have even ended up in a strategic partnership with his company.

Chris was not able to deepen the trust to a level that would have made this kind of exploration possible. To me as a buyer, it was quite obvious that his main interest was to sell any of their products even though he didn't do it in a pushy way. Instead, we stayed at the product level and in situations such as this, customers end up either buying a small solution, which will lead to some improvements, or buying nothing at all.

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Conclusion: If you are focused on selling your product rather than on the best possible outcome for your potential buyer, you might miss out on great opportunities and will become a mere product consultant. Instead, if you coach your buyer through his best buying decision, you will not only create first-class relationships but will also expand the potential for doing business with your prospective buyers.

** Details of the case study have been altered to protect the identity of the vendor.*



Charlie Lang is an Executive Coach and Trainer who founded Progress-U Limited in 2002. His mission is to achieve a positive change of the image of sales. He is a passionate and professional Executive Coach, Mentor Coach, Trainer, Public Speaker and Author of articles related to leadership, change management and innovative sales.

In 2004, he initiated the Master Coach Alliance (see <http://www.master-coach-alliance.com>) in Hong Kong, a network of professional Life, Business and Corporate Coaches. End of 2004, he started authoring the book "The Groupness Factor" (see <http://www.progressu.com.hk/Groupness-book.htm>) which got published in August 2005.

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