

How to Sell Engineered Systems

Strategies and Tactics that Work

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Engineered Systems are custom-designed and fabricated tools to improve productivity. These systems are cost sensitive and require significant economic justification. Their value-added in the production process is to increase efficiency and to safely enhance throughput. There is wide application for engineered systems in the petrochemical, food processing, industrial materials handling and virtually all manufacturing industries.

Successful, profitable business development for firms providing engineered systems design, fabrication, installation and support is more easily understood through examination of the significant components of the sales process itself. Each significant step contributes to the overall success of this critical commercial development effort.

Step 1. Create Persuasive Sales Tools

TESTIMONIALS. An engineered system is a major investment for the prospective account. He is fearful that your company may not have the resources and capabilities to design a system that works. He is also fearful that you will not be able to support your installation with competent after-sales maintenance support. Consequently, your very best sales tool is a satisfied customer who will provide verbal and written testimonials on your professional competence, responsiveness, collaborative spirit and ease of doing business with your company. **HINT: Maintain close relationships with existing customers. Visit them at least annually. Create a “Systems Application Report” on their installation. This one-page document would include a photo of their project, a description of the production problems, your solution and the customer’s testimonial.**

DIAGNOSTIC INTERVIEW GUIDE. The heart of selling complicated engineered products is the diagnostic needs analysis survey. These multiple face-to-face interviews with the prospective target account enables you to develop answers to the following questions:

What is their current situation?

What are their problems?

What is the cost of the problems now in lost productivity, excessive maintenance, etc.?

What would be the usefulness and economic value of the (our) solution to the account?

Several “open-ended” questions for each of the four topics above should be structured in your interview guide. The more you can do homework on the company through study of their website and other resources, the more intelligent your questions can be. For example, “What kind of work do you do?” is a good open-ended question. But, “What kind of productivity problems have you encountered in your handling of “x” commodity?” demonstrates your depth of understanding of their particular situation.

POWER-POINT CAPABILITIES PRESENTATION. A short, succinct presentation on who you are, what is your history, what have you done and what you are capable of doing should be designed to reduce the prospective customer’s FEAR of engaging your firm. **HINT: In addition to illustrating your technical skills, emphasize your competence and understanding of economic justification, operator safety, ease of operation, routine maintenance, after-sales maintenance support, scheduled maintenance programs and emergency service support.**

WEBSITE ENHANCEMENT. Make certain your website is user-friendly as possible to enhance your visitor’s experience. Focus on developing “content inventory” to include white papers, e-books and useful problem-solving articles.

Step 2. Prospect Intelligently

IDEAL PROSPECT. For this next year, you don't need 100's of large prospects, you only need about 12 really good ones. First, define your "ideal" prospect: industry segment, company size, company growth history, financial strength, credit strength, applications within your primary scope of experience, physical locations within your maintenance service area, and prestige of having this company as a client.

ENTRY STRATEGY. Once you have developed a list of 12 target/conquest accounts, build your entry strategy for each. Your objective should be to identify high-level management access points in each account. Who in your organization, your bank, your suppliers, your trade organization knows and can introduce you to senior executives in your target accounts?

Simultaneously, within each target account, identify contacts in operations and maintenance. These are the people you will visit and ask your first three sets of diagnostic questions (above) prior to your visit with their top executives.

ACCOUNT PROFILE WORKSHEET. Create a "Key Account Profile" worksheet to help collect and organize the intelligence you gather on each of your 12 target accounts. Contact me if you would like the one we use in my *Machinery and Product Support Executive Selling Skills Workshop* (walt@mcdonaldgroupinc.com).

Step 3. Establish Realistic Short-Term Sales Objectives

FIRST SELL MAINTENANCE. Don't try to make your first sale a multi-million euro project. In your operations-level diagnostic interviewing process attempt to identify maintenance issues that you can resolve quickly and competently. Build in the prospective target account management team the perception of your interest and capability of supporting them after the sale.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK. Use this opportunity to get to know their organization, the major influencers, the major decision makers, the technical and financial evaluators, their growth plans, their fears, their bad experiences, their hopes and dreams. Creatively determine how your company can contribute long-term to their growth and financial success. Which account managers will sponsor your sales effort? Continue to build your Target Account intelligence profile. Customer knowledge is power. This is not hit-and-run. Your objective is to demonstrate your interest and capability of a long-term collaborative partner relationship.

Step 4. Make Executive Presentations, Conduct High-Level Diagnostic Interviews, Build Confidence in Your Capabilities

GO FOR IT. You are now armed and ready to go for the major engineered projects in this account. Building on the information and intelligence you have gathered, refine and revise your power-point capabilities presentation and update your four sets of diagnostic questions to make them specific to this account.

LIVING TESTIMONIALS. Invite the potential customer to visit your facility and introduce them to your people assembled to explain your project development and management process and technology. This is to assure them of your capabilities. Then, arrange for them to visit one of your previously engineered and functioning plants, installations or facilities for them to receive the accolades of that happy customer.

KEEP FOCUSED ON WHAT'S IN IT FOR THEM. In every conversation with your prospect demonstrate your interest in helping them increase productivity, reduce cost and increase revenue.

Suggested Readings

The Six-Hat Salesperson by David Kahle

The Alligator Trap by Edward R. Del Gaizo

The Industrial (Marketing) Revolution by Jared R. Fabac

Walter McDonald is President of The McDonald Group, Inc. and has conducted over 2,650 management workshops and seminars world-wide in the industrial equipment environment. The McDonald Group, Inc. offers management education programs for marketing sales and operations managers and field sales executives. He is a frequent contributor to several trade magazines. Walter's popular management training programs focus on improving market share, profitability, cash flow and customer retention. You may reach Walter at 847/340-5518 or Walt@McDonaldGroupInc.com. His website is www.mcdonaldgroupinc.com.