

Working With The Well-Informed Client

You're sitting at your desk trying to clear up some paperwork when the phone rings. You answer it, and the receptionist asks if you would please step out front and talk with a client who's just walked in asking about the new model. You say, "Yes, I'm on my way" and with a quick glance in the mirror, you head up front.

As you walk toward the prospective buyer, you notice he (or she) is holding a folder overflowing with papers, a copy of the latest *Consumers' Reports Buyers' Guide* and a clipboard. He is scowling slightly as he sees you and is obviously making quick judgments about your appearance. Do you

- a. Walk past the client (smiling briefly) and head out the front door to look for another job?
- b. Do an immediate u-turn and head for the restroom, mumbling something about a sudden attack of the stomach flu?
- c. Smile broadly at the client, offer your hand and thank him for coming in so obviously prepared?
- d. Say hello to the client, tell the receptionist that you have an appointment with another client 10 minutes from now and ask could she please call another sales person to work with *this* client?

If you answered "a", "b" or "d", this article could help you to make you big money down the road. If you answered "c", you probably know much of what is contained in this article, and will pick up a few pointers to help fine-tune your process.

When someone arrives at your place of business who has taken the time to research his or her purchase, you most often have a client who is planning on purchasing your product. (S)he is someone who will buy from you if you earn the right to be the one from whom the purchase is made. Easy, you say? Yes, it is... but only if:

- You've done your homework **and**
- You know more than most of your counterparts **and**
- You offer additional information that the client doesn't already have **and**
- You treat the client the way (s)he wants to be treated.

Yikes!

Let's start with where you need to be when the well-informed client first walks in or calls. You need to have done your homework and know not only where your clients get their information but also what that information is. How do you do this? Ask them—but not first thing.

You must first earn the right to ask by offering the client something... a sincere complement. Something as simple as,

“You have apparently spent quite a bit of time researching your purchase decision. I love it when a client comes in well-informed, because it makes my job so much easier.”

This simple statement will let clients know that not only will you respect them and their information, but also that you have a history of successful dealing with others who were similarly prepared. This, by the way, puts you in the minority (a good thing for you). In most cases, this will also allow a client to comfortably share what information (s)he possesses and where it was obtained. You may even be able to make copies of the information for future study and/or use. After talking with a few clients, you will have a significant amount of material and many ideas as to where you can find more.

In most industries, the most common source from which a well-informed client gets information is the Internet. Find out from your co-workers and managers what Internet sites are most frequently mentioned by clients and visit them. There are new web sites every day, and many of the most-frequently visited sites are updated regularly (for those of you in the automotive industry, we have a page on this site ([Automotive Links](#)) that has 45 manufacturers' sites and 13 of the most frequently visited third-party automotive sites). Initially this may seem an impossible and overwhelming task, but just remember that the best way to eat an elephant is “one bite at a time.”

The most efficient way to get up-to-speed on the Internet is to:

1. Pick one new site to study each week.
2. Find and read everything on each site that relates to the products you sell.
3. Print out as many pages as you can and keep them in a binder for future reference.
4. Sign up for all newsletters and mailing lists that sound like they would contain useful information—and unsubscribe to the ones that don't deliver.
5. After your initial visit, return to each site at least once a month to keep up on changes and new material.
6. Share your information with clients and co-workers.

For those of you who are not reading this on-line or who do not have regular Internet access, every public library has free Internet access and offers the ability to print web pages for a nominal fee.

There may be times when clients have erroneous or incomplete information. When this happens, if you have respected and complimented their research, they will most likely welcome your accurate or updated information. Like all information presented to any client, it is very important that you present it in a logical manner and have research/third-party materials to back it up. Do not rely solely on your good rapport-building skills—have the hard data. If possible, offer to go on-line with the client to check things out together.

Well-informed clients do not usually need to go through all of the “steps to the sale.” Identify where the client is in the process and respond accordingly. Ask questions like, “What do you hope to accomplish during your visit today?” and “How much time do you have to spend?” It is also very important to determine his or her preferences and then tailor the process to those preferences. Provide any specific information requested and answer all follow-up questions the customer may have.

At the beginning of this article, we promised to explain how to treat the well-informed client the way (s)he wants to be treated...

You’ve already done it!

You have:

- Done your homework and learned where clients do their research
- Respected and complimented the client’s preparation
- Known more than most of your counterparts and more than the client about the products
- Offered whatever additional information you have that the client doesn’t
- Used facts and printed materials to tactfully correct any erroneous information the client had without making him or her feel stupid or attacked
- Tailored the process to meet the client’s preferences
- Answered any and all questions the client may have

And you thought this client was going to be a challenge...

Next time someone shows up holding a folder overflowing with papers, a copy of the latest *Consumers’ Reports Buyers’ Guide* and a clipboard, you will walk quickly toward them—smiling and extending your hand—and have fun helping them purchase from **you**.