



QUESTION- BASED SELLING

ASKING GREAT QUESTIONS IS THE
KEY TO ACHIEVING SALES SUCCESS.

by Tom Goos





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merchandise experience, he has successfully executed many major launches and campaigns for Fortune 500 companies, which puts his personal sales in the top one percent of all distributors nationally. An active industry volunteer, Goos served two years as president of Northwest Promotional Marketing Association (NWPMA), and he currently sits on the board of directors for the Promotional Products Association International (PPAI). Reach him at tom@imagesourceteam.com.

How many times have you left a meeting wishing you had asked the tough questions that would set you up for success? Are you afraid to go down that road? You might be surprised to find out that your client will develop respect for your willingness to push the envelope.

Let's assume you have a game plan and have rehearsed the tough questions you plan to ask. Unfortunately, you finished the meeting but felt uncomfortable deep-diving into the probing questions. Why?

All promotional-product salespeople ask budget and quantity questions. Set yourself apart by digging deep into understanding what the client is trying to accomplish or better understanding their competition. Shed the fears and incorporate question-based selling into your daily routine to drive sales success.

Always come prepared with the information you need to serve the best ideas to your client. You also need to think through the questions you need answered to earn their business. Some of these questions may take you outside of your comfort zone, but ultimately, they will lead to an order and a long-term client.

Make your list and check it twice. Every industry has slight variations of questions, but most are consistent for promotional product professionals. What follows is a list to start with and some details on what you'll discover by asking.



QUESTION-BASED SELLING

Q: WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH WITH THIS CAMPAIGN?

Is your customer trying to drive attendance at a tradeshow booth, motivate their employees, drive sales or launch a new brand? Knowing the goals and objectives will not only save you a lot of time but it will elevate your status by providing spot-on ideas the first go-round.

Q: WHO IS THE TARGET AUDIENCE? WHAT IS THE DEMOGRAPHIC?

Is it a millennial audience at a college recruiting tradeshow or a CEO forum? You have a million products to choose from, so it is absolutely critical to understand the target audience.

Q: HOW WILL YOU MEASURE THE SUCCESS OF THE PRODUCT?

Oh this is a scary one. Be careful what you ask for. Measuring the success of a promotional product is critical to understanding the success of the activity or event. If it is a direct marketing piece, they can quantify the exact ROI. Or, perhaps the client measures success through overall traffic at the tradeshow booth or the volume of sales leads. This question will deepen the relationship between you and your client and show them you are a true promotional product professional who understands marketing.

Q: HOW WILL THE PRODUCT BE DISTRIBUTED?

You can add value to the client by understanding the distribution plan and making recommendations based on their specific scenario. As an example, if they are planning for a tradeshow with an 8' x 8' booth and plan to distribute 1,000 travel mugs, that won't work. Or is the client thinking about custom chocolate for a summer picnic in Texas? You can help them think through the distribution scenario and add value through experience.

Q: WHAT DID YOU DO LAST YEAR? WAS IT SUCCESSFUL?

Your client may have loved or hated what they did last year. Understanding how the product and experience landed can help you narrow the scope and please the client on the first round of ideas.

Q: HAVE YOU SEEN IDEAS YOU LIKE?

All of our clients have some type of experience with promotional products. More than likely, there is a category they love or hate. So, asking the question can be a key driver to uncovering the perfect product.

Q: DO YOU NEED PACKAGING, FULFILLMENT OR SPECIAL LOGISTICS?

Add to the sale with special services. These services can add value for the client and good margin to your bottom line.



Q: WHO ELSE ARE YOU WORKING WITH? IS THIS A BID SCENARIO OR WILL YOU HONOR THE BEST IDEA THAT WE OFFER?

This is one of those uncomfortable questions but is one that will help you understand the buying environment. This is a great way to determine margin and follow up on the quote. If your idea is honored, you can spend more time on the creative side and increase your profit margin. If this is a bid scenario where the final idea will re-bid, spend less time on ideas and work harder on supplier pricing.

Q: WHAT IS THE EVENT DATE?

This is a very obvious question but if you forget to ask and offer ideas that have a long lead-time, you might end up with an upset client. It is also good to drill into the event date. Maybe it is a weeklong event starting on Monday but they need to package it with another product. Or, they have plans to place the item on employees' desks. It is easy to miss the true in-hands date without a few key questions.



Q: WHAT IS THE QUANTITY AND BUDGET?

We all ask this! You should also find out if the budget includes tax and shipping. You don't want to shock them later with these costs.

Q: HOW AM I DIFFERENT? I ASK THE TOUGH QUESTIONS!

Step outside your comfort zone and ask these key questions. If you do, your close ratio will improve and your time per project will go down. You might want to consider printing the questions out and filling it out right in front of the client. In the end, the client will appreciate how thorough you have been.

Differentiating your company can be difficult these days. We all sell similar products from many of the same supplier partners. Ask the tough questions to help stand out from the competition and provide the difference to earn your clients' trust. Make this part of your daily routine. ■

