

# Follow Up Skills Can Help You Gain a Competitive Advantage

By Marisa Pensa



As an independent dealer, one of your key goals has to be gaining a competitive advantage and setting yourself apart from everyone else out there. A big part of the way you do that is by demonstrating excellent follow up skills throughout the entire sales process.

It can be so easy to leave a meeting or end a phone call feeling like the prospect is interested.

You had great rapport. They gave you a list. They gave you specific issues they have experienced. Then, you call the

following week and can't get them on the phone or can't get them to come out to see you. Sound familiar?

In selling, particularly in this industry, it is critical to gain a next step after every interaction with a prospect. Prospects may mean well, but time kills deals and it is so very easy to lose momentum.

Prospect may tell you they are interested but that often does little more than give you false hope. Real interest is backed up by a commitment to take some kind of action. It could be meeting with you,

speaking with you or doing something else for you, and is typically scheduled to happen in two weeks. This planned action is the all-important Next Step.

A Next Step is tangible evidence that someone is working with you. It's not a gut feeling that the person is interested in playing ball with you but genuine proof of that interest. Curious about your ability to get to the Next Step?

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Take a moment to answer this question:

How many of my prospects have MY name in THEIR calendars, waiting to hear from me in the next two weeks?

Why fight for a scheduled Next Step? Here's why:

## Reason #1:

**You Get a Reaction.** Securing a date and time on your prospect's calendar gives you tangible evidence that they are interested. If you cannot secure a mutually agreed upon date and time for another appointment, ask yourself: If they will not agree to talk or meet with me, what makes me think they will eventually BUY from me?

## Reason #2:

**You Will Improve Your Closing Ratio.** If a quote or proposal was requested, it is critical that you not send it by email without setting a specific date and time to review the quote/proposal with your prospect. How many times has someone responded, "You are not cheaper than what we are currently paying. I think I'll stay with my current vendor."

By securing a mutually agreed upon date and time to review the quote with the prospect in advance, you will:

- Proactively address any pricing concerns.
- Have an opportunity to suggest items that are more cost-effective.
- Dramatically improve your closing ratio.

Always ask for a next step! "How does Tuesday at 2 look for you?"

## Reason #3:

**You Will Shorten Your Selling Cycle.** At the end of a sales meeting or phone call, most salespeople say "I'll call you next week." Then they end up wasting all kinds of time playing phone tag. Why not set the Next Step while you're still face to face or

on the phone? You can save one to three weeks between each meeting—and perhaps trim as much as a month off of your overall sales cycle.

## Reason #4:

**You Can Demonstrate Excellent Follow-Up Skills.** By proactively scheduling a time to talk, review a quote, personally take a first order or walk your prospect through the online ordering process, you are demonstrating the superior service you are willing to provide, even before the first order is placed.

## Reason #5:

**Your Time Management Will Improve.** Here's a fact of sales life: The quote/proposal that's due "sometime next week" will probably slip to the bottom of your priority list. The proposal that's due because of a meeting you've scheduled for next Tuesday at 2:00 will be less likely to slip. You will work more efficiently when you have a scheduled deadline.

## Reason #6:

**You'll Prioritize Your Follow Up.** Let's say it's a busy month. Maybe you have 20 first appointments. Say that seven of them don't go anywhere—you get a clear No or the person is obviously unqualified.

If you don't ask for a Next Step at the end of the first meeting, then 13 people are now in call-me-next-week-some-time mode.

Come to think of it, you also have thirteen people like that from LAST month... and thirteen from the month before that ... But suppose you only have time for five quality proposals this month. Which prospects do you focus on?

Well, if you regularly ask for a Next Step, you'll know exactly who you should write a proposal for—the people who agreed to a Next Step!

Remember, real interest is demonstrated by ACTION. You are making the people who agreed to a Next Step your priority because at least they agreed to see you again. Other prospects DIDN'T agree to see you.

So again, here's the question: If they didn't agree to SEE you, what makes you think they'll BUY from you?

## Reason #7:

**You'll Send the Right Message.** Translation: My time is valuable, too. Consider this: We teach people how to buy from us. So we don't want to say, "When are you free?" but rather, "I've got a slot at 11:00 on Tuesday morning. Does that work?"

Sending the "When are you free?" message is professional suicide. Why would you want to send someone the message, "I'll go way out of my way to spend two minutes with you?"

## Reason #8:

**You Worked Too Damn Hard to Set up the Appointment in the First Place to Let it Go.** You've made a sizeable time investment to set up a first meeting, drive out and meet with the prospect.

Even if you only sell by phone, you have made 20 or more calls to find just one prospect and then fought through objections to engage them in a meaningful conversation. Why in the world would we end that call without a mutually agreed upon date and time to talk again?

Good selling to all of you and have a great third quarter!

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Marisa Pensa is the owner of Methods in Motion, a sales training organization that has helped hundreds of companies, both in the office supply industry and across a range of industries, start inside sales teams from the ground up and develop both new and seasoned sales professionals and sales managers. For more information, visit [www.methodsmotion.com](http://www.methodsmotion.com).