

ENTERPRISE

From the July 1, 2005 print edition

Sales solutions

Establish your credibility as an expert in the field

[Andrea Sittig-Rolf](#)

Question: I work for a large company and while they do a lot of advertising and have great brand awareness, it's not enough to position me as a specialist in my field. I've been a sales professional for 10 years in the same industry. What can I do personally, above and beyond my company's efforts, that will communicate to my prospects that I am the best salesperson for them to work with and can offer the best solution to meet their needs?

Answer: You must establish credibility with your prospects to be considered an expert in your field. Then, and only then, should you even think about trying to sell them something.

So, how do you do that? You write, speak, and help others. In the June 17 edition of "Sales Solutions," I described why writing is one of the best things you can do to establish credibility with your prospects and customers. Now, I will explain how speaking, and helping others will position you to establish credibility as well.

Speaking and writing go hand-in-hand. In other words, what you write about, you can speak about as well. Make a list of the topics you've written about and consider developing a speech out of them to offer to industry-relevant audiences. Contact your local chamber of commerce, industry associations, and other appropriate groups for which you can offer your speaking expertise. Keep in mind that speeches can take many forms such as a keynote, workshop, or training.

A keynote speech is generally 45 minutes to an hour in length and is specifically designed to address why, whereas as a workshop should be intended to address the how to. Oftentimes chambers of commerce and other industry associations are actively looking for speakers to provide a keynote or workshop at their monthly meetings. Simply look up your local chamber and industry associations online, and look for a listing of the staff, specifically the event coordinator or program coordinator. You may also be able to find the process to follow to be considered as a speaker.

If this information is not available online, just call the main number, and ask for the event or program coordinator, who will most likely be your point of contact for offering your speaking services. In addition to this, as you become known as a writer in your field, you may actually be contacted directly by your local chamber and industry associations and asked to speak at their upcoming events.

Different from keynotes and workshops, training requires a more in-depth look at your particular area of expertise and may require a full day or more to actually teach others more about your specialty. Offering free training to prospects and customers to educate them about

your industry, products, and services is an excellent way to establish credibility and become the "go-to" person when they have a need for your expertise.

Educating prospects and customers is a natural part of the sales process. Offering free training in a group setting, i.e. with several prospects and customers at a time, allows you to train many people at once. A group setting also allows your prospects and customers to learn more about what you have to offer without the pressure of a one-on-one sales call.

Finally, helping others is an incredibly effective way to establish, or enhance, your credibility. Make an effort to learn about what your colleagues, associates, networking partners, prospects, and customers want, and do what you can to help them get it.

For example, if you have a colleague who is looking for a job, help him find a job. If you have a prospect who is looking to hire a new salesperson, help her find a new salesperson. Offer qualified leads and referrals to your networking partners. Help your prospects and customers get more of what they want, even if it doesn't involve selling them your products and services. Giving and offering help to others without the expectation of reciprocation often comes back tenfold and in the process, not only enhances your credibility, but solidifies your good reputation.

ANDREA SITTIG-ROLF is a public speaker, author, and president of Sittig Northwest, Inc., a sales training and consulting firm. Her new book, "Business to Business Prospecting: Innovative Techniques to Get Your Foot in the Door with Any Prospect" will be published in August (Aspatore Books). Reach her at 206-769-4886, www.sittignw.com, or info@sittignw.com.