

The 5-Step Sales Process You Don't Have



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Have you ever tried to start a conversation about your products and services, only to find yourself at a loss for words? Or perhaps you know *what* to say, but you're not sure *how* to say it?

As sellers, it literally pays us to understand how buyers naturally buy, and then construct our sales process to support them during their buying journey. Ever heard of the **Consumer Buying Decision Process**? For those of you who haven't, it's a five-step process (attributed to psychologist John Dewey) which describes the unconscious method people use to buy everything from a pack of gum to a new house. Today, we'll show you how understanding this *modus operandi* will help you turn booth visitors into new clients.

How Buying REALLY Works

1) All You Need is Love

The **buying process begins** when a consumer perceives that she has an **unmet need**. No need = no purchase. Need recognition is triggered by internal or external stimuli.

An **internal stimulus** relates to how you feel, either mentally or physically. Examples of internal stimuli include thirst, pain (ex: a headache), and even fear – like the fear of rejection. An **external stimulus** comes from an outside source, such as an advertisement reminding you to buy sunscreen during the hot, summer months.

So, your buyer decides that she has a problem to solve, which brings us to the next step in the process...

2) The Thirst for Knowledge

In this stage, buyers attempt to identify all possible options by gathering information. Again, most shoppers will consult multiple resources, both internal and external.

Internal information is information that we've accumulated over the years and stored in our memories – either unconsciously or through personal experience. For example, when deciding on hotel accommodations, you'll remember where you've stayed in the past. You might even recall hotels you've never stayed in, but remember anyway (the fruits of good advertising and branding). **External information** comes from outside sources, either personal (ex: Grandma Betty's favorite brand of oatmeal) or public (books, online forums, etc.).

Once your buyers have all their information in hand, it's time for them to start narrowing the field.



3) Alternative Investments

At this point, your potential client is deciding who she wants to invite to her party. Your job is to earn a spot on the guest list. Using the data she's gathered, the shopper will create two sets of companies that she thinks will (or won't!) help her fulfill her need. The **Evoked Set** – the short list you'll want to be on – represents companies that a buyer favors when considering a purchase. The **Inept Set** – avoid at all costs – represents companies that a buyer rejects when considering a purchase.



Once you know you're on someone's Evoked Set, your task is to **convince your buyer** that **your company is the most capable** of solving her problem.

4) “Shut Up and Take My Money!”

She’s come, she’s seen, and now she’s ready to purchase! Barring any last-minute negative feedback from someone she trusts, your prospect has made her decision.



5) WAIT! We’re Not Done Yet...

A lot of people don’t realize that **the buying process doesn’t stop at the point of purchase**. Yeah, you read that right... the Consumer Buying Decision Process still affects you! Consumers will evaluate your product as they use it and, based on that, will either give you a positive response (aka **buyer’s satisfaction**: good word-of-mouth, repeat purchases) or a negative response (aka **buyer’s remorse**: returning the product, bad reviews, placing your company in their Inept Sets).



The Odyssey to “Yes”

“So, this is great information, but how can I apply it to my trade show?”, you ask. The roadmap to success is **knowing where your prospect is** in the Consumer Buying Decision Process. Now that you’ve got your roadmap in hand, use the directions below to steer prospects from need recognition to product acquisition.

NOTE: Different people will arrive at your booth at different stages in the buying decision process; **not all the conversations will begin at the same stage!** Some prospects will be at stage 1, evaluating their problem. Others may be at stage 3, working through their short lists of candidates. Identify your prospect’s stage, then use the tips below to move him through the rest of the process.

Need Recognition -> Information Search

When prospects visit your trade show booth, their ideal situations will differ from their actual situations

– the reason the need exists in the first place. Identify why your visitors have come to your booth. Knowing what brings them by will help you determine if your product is their solution. Ask them if your current product offering might solve the problems they're facing. If not, see if you can be of service to them down the road. If you can get people to agree that your product can help satisfy one of their needs, you're one step closer to closing a sale.

Information Search -> Alternative Evaluation

If someone is at this point in his decision-making process, he will become aware of more and more alternatives, including those offered by your competition. Educate him on how your product's benefits and features specifically address his need, and you'll position yourself as a credible resource in his mind.

Alternative Evaluation -> Purchase Decision

If you're engaged with a trade show prospect who's at this point in his decision-making process – and you're not the preferred vendor – dig a little deeper to find out what matters to him. Is it product quality? Customer service? Social proof? Outline how your product is the superior choice and the best bang for his buck. Prove that you can deliver what your prospect's looking for, and you'll increase your chance of making the final cut.

Purchase Decision and Beyond

A "sale" at your booth may not require the exchange of money... yet. Sometimes your desired outcome may be for someone to simply say "Yes" to the next step of your sales process: a face-to-face meeting after the show, participation in a full product demonstration, or review of a proposal.

Our journey ends with the most important step: follow-up. Follow-up can take many different forms, which depend on the "Yes" you hear during the purchase decision phase. If you're met with radio silence from your prospect's end, reach out to make sure things are in order for completing the sale.



The Rear-View Review

With all the stress involved in the trade show planning process, give yourself the edge (and one less thing to worry about!) by remembering the Consumer Buying Decision Process. It's clear, concise, and just simple enough to apply to every conversation. Let's break it down one more time:

1. **Need Recognition:** Identify the prospect's need.
2. **Information Search:** Educate your prospect, and highlight product features or benefits that will solve her problem.
3. **Alternative Evaluation:** When your product is compared to those of other vendors, portray yourself as the prime choice.
4. **Purchase Decision:** When it's time to buy, compel buyers to say "Yes" to your company.
5. **Post-Purchase Evaluation:** Your relationship with a client doesn't end with a purchase. Follow up to ensure your customer's needs were truly met.

Conversations at trade shows don't need to be daunting or hard, but they do need to be effective. Get into the driver's seat, take control of the conversation, and steer it towards trade show success!



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