



Book

Insight Selling

Sell Value & Differentiate Your Product with Insight Scenarios

Michael Harris

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Tell stories that lead buyers to the value you offer, so they discover it for themselves.

Recommendation

The Internet provides such comprehensive product information that B2B buyers needn't deal with B2B sellers until quite late in the sales cycle. At that stage, customers don't need features-and-benefits information; they need specific insights told through stories that are tailored to their situation. Sales-training expert Michael Harris explains how B2B salespeople can deliver these insights for maximum results. His technique transforms B2B prospects' classical wariness of sales representatives into enthusiasm for learning about and buying what they sell. Harris backs up his recommendations with impressive research. He explains why salespeople must be able to tell good stories to win customers. Ironically, the author is a good instructor, but he could be a better storyteller. In most chapters, he explains his point of view quite satisfactorily, but in some, he's confusing and even contradictory. When Harris is on target, his advice is very useful. *getAbstract* recommends his potent approach to B2B salespeople who need to know how to tell their product's story for maximum sales impact.

In this summary, you will learn

- What an "insight scenario" is and how it works
- How salespeople benefit when they tell insight scenarios
- How to develop and use these scenarios to make sales and become a trusted adviser

Take-Aways

- Readily available product and services information on the Internet complicates B2B sales.
- Today's B2B buyers don't need B2B salespeople to tell them a product or service's features and benefits; they need sellers to offer specific, useful insights.
- Your insights should make the buyer stop and think; they should not challenge the buyer.
- "Insight scenarios" differentiate your offering and present its value via storytelling.

- An insight scenario is a story that describes how your product solved a parallel customer's difficult situation.
- An insight scenario lets buyers independently recognize the value of your offering.
- SAP and Microsoft use insight selling and created "Chief Storyteller" positions.
- Insight scenarios should be concrete, emotional and never confrontational.
- An insight scenario should be 250 to 350 words long, and should take 90 to 120 seconds to tell.
- Insight scenarios enable you to shift from salesperson to respected adviser.

Summary

"Humans have told insight scenario stories visually for 100,000 years, orally for 10,000 years and in writing for 6,000 years."

Insights, Not Product Details

In sales in the past, buyers relied on salespeople for the information they needed to make intelligent purchase decisions. Now, thanks to the Internet, buyers can easily research alternative products and services and compare prices. Today's buyers rarely deal with salespeople until they have progressed through 60% of the sales cycle. The tendency of buyers is to commoditize B2B products and services and to insist on discounts from sellers. Buyers do not want salespeople who "show up and throw up" litanies of features and benefits, or who irritate them with 20 questions. Buyers seek useful insights that enable them to make solid purchase decisions. They "do not have the time or expertise" to understand the best options. They find it difficult to filter and make sense of the overwhelming amount of information on the Internet. Buyers can't determine the "generic value" of particular products or services. Many don't purchase or they purchase based only on price.

"Listening...is the least-developed skill in sales, because we all think we do it. Listening is more than just listening to someone's words: It is listening without filters or judgment."

"Insight Scenarios"

An insight scenario is a very brief story about a company you rescued from an emergency through the use of your product or service. A well-constructed scenario reveals your product's "hidden value." Because an insight scenario is about someone other than the buyer, he or she can accept it without feeling challenged or defensive. Think of an insight scenario as a "Trojan horse" that gets your sales message over the buyer's "defensive wall."

Insight scenarios are not the same as "value propositions," which buyers automatically discount. Insight scenarios also differ from case studies. Case studies work well late in the selling process by providing compelling rationales for buying decisions. But case studies have no place early in the sales process. They overload skeptical buyers with too much information.

"Insight Dials"

Sellers must communicate value, differentiate their offerings and show customers a clear route to buying. To do this, call upon three insight dials:

"Salespeople no longer hold the keys they once did to the information kingdom. Today, to add value, salespeople must do more than just

1. **"Contrast"** – The seller illustrates the contrast between a buyer's situation before purchasing the product or service and after. The greater the demonstrable contrast, the greater the value the story conveys to your offering.
2. **"Listening"** – Buyers' visions are like movies playing inside their heads. To understand that movie and confirm it with their insights, sellers must listen carefully to buyers.
3. **"Clarity"** – After communicating compelling before-and-after insight scenarios, sellers should question buyers so they can compare their

provide information; they need to provide insight.”

situations to those scenarios. Buyers’ answers should illuminate their “before-and-after picture.” After the buyer identifies a problem, ask a follow-up question: “And then what happens?” Questioning lets the buyer “take your product [or service] out for a virtual test drive.”

Using Insight Scenarios

By using insight scenarios, salespeople can deliver an “Aha!’ moment” that reframes their prospects’ buying vision. The insights you share with your prospects will not perform in terms of sales results unless you craft your stories to reflect your in-depth understanding of how your customers and their competitors make money.

“Tell a story to hear the buyer’s story.”

Insights should not become “free consulting.” Avoid this by referring only to your product or service’s singular capabilities. Insights should challenge the buyer’s mind-set – but never challenge the buyer. A challenge might provoke a customer to become defensive. An insight scenario delivers a telling moment of revelation that engages your consumer. These brief stories about other customers recount how your product or service moved them from bad situations to good ones. Your story lets buyers draw a new conclusion about how your offering might improve their firm’s situation.

Asahi Glass

Maxine, the supply chain director of Asahi Glass, did not know which orders would deliver the most profit and which might be unprofitable in real time. Some sales orders that initially looked profitable turned out to be losers. Salespeople placed orders without considering Asahi’s current production capacity and without knowing at all how one order might negatively affect another.

“Before sellers can close the value gap with their product, they first have to open it. The salesperson cannot lead with value, but must... lead the buyer to the value.”

Maxine wanted a tool her company’s salespeople could use to gain “a more dynamic view of profitability” to inform their glass sales. A supposedly “profitable Toyota order” ended up being hugely unprofitable, due to potential “delayed order penalties” that forced Asahi to fly parts to the production plant.

Maxine found a solution with the Advance Schedule Corp. The company provided Asahi with a tool that evaluated orders based on production capacity and that tracked the orders’ impact on other orders. The company’s salespeople liked the tool. They could “pool their orders” and use price comparisons to generate additional profitable sales.

Insight Scenario Benefits

When you present your compelling insight scenario, immediately segue from your story to the buyer’s story. Say: “That’s enough about client X, what’s your story?” Include two to four insight scenarios in your conversation during your sales meeting with a client.

“A salesperson has to be sure...not to provide ‘free consulting,’ and then have the customer buy the product cheaper from a competitor.”

An insight scenario has these six advantages:

1. **“Puts the customer’s ego to sleep”** – Since insight scenarios do not challenge buyers, they don’t feel pressured, and they will listen to what you say.
2. **“Makes the customer care”** – Insight scenarios deliver the context that helps clients understand why it makes sense to buy from you.
3. **“Generates value”** – Insight scenarios are word pictures. They demonstrate that a situation the buyer regards as acceptable, or at least bearable, is really quite unproductive. An effective scenario shows that only your product or service can provide the specific solution the customer needs.
4. **Remains “memorable”** – Facts do not evoke emotion. Add emotion to your facts through storytelling to move customers and help them remember your information.

“To buy, the customer must...think an offering is right, but more

important, the customer must feel...it is right."

"According to a recent survey by Sales Benchmark Index, over 60% of sales opportunities end with the buyer deciding to stick with the status quo and not buying."

"Because an insight scenario is about someone else, the customer does not feel attacked...that allows the customer to draw their own conclusions."

"Doctors and salespeople will tell you...customers and patients do not make good decisions on their own."

5. **Tells a story** – People have communicated important information through stories (the insight scenario format) since prehistoric times. Story telling is “hard-wired” into your DNA. Both SAP and Microsoft use insight selling, and both have established “Chief Storyteller” positions.
6. **“Sharpens the saw”** – Through sales coaching, you can use insight scenarios to uncover gaps in your sales teams’ knowledge of your products or services. Coach your salespeople to create insight scenarios “in just 10 minutes per week.” Have them practice developing two-minute, memorable stories about their customers’ challenges. Make sure these stories are brief – 250 to 350 words – and feature clear before-and-after contrasts. Before creating their stories, your salespeople must develop a “helicopter view of the customer’s world.” They must view a client’s world in totality, including its markets, competitors and challenges. Without a comprehensive understanding of the customer’s situation, a salesperson cannot transform a prospect’s thinking.

Successful Insight Scenarios

Insight scenarios simply are stories describing how your offering solved specific problems for people in the real world. An insight scenario does not discuss features and benefits. To be successful, however, it must meet three criteria. It must be “nonconfrontational,” concrete (that is, it supplies the necessary context) and “wrapped in emotion,” which is “necessary for decision making.”

Developing an insight scenario involves seven steps:

1. **“Why?”** – Understand the purpose of your insight scenario. It should dramatically spotlight value for the buyers. It should demonstrate the gap between the space where the buyers currently operate (in your scenario, this space is bad), and the space where they will operate (in your scenario, that will be very good), thanks to your product or service.
2. **“Setting”** – Introduce your insight scenario to the buyer. Say, “Let me tell you about Paul, the VP of finance of a manufacturing company who was looking to reduce inventory costs.”
3. **“Complication”** – Many buyers believe they are doing fine and have no reason to change. Dissuade them. You don’t want buyers to think a problem your product can solve is only “ankle deep.” Instead, you want them to believe they are drowning in the middle of the ocean, and you are the rescue boat. The complication is the crucial part of your insight scenario. To characterize the enormity of the problem the buyer faces, use a “simile, metaphor or an analogy.” Create the maximum amount of contrast between the buyer’s current situation and how your offering will change and fix it.
4. **“Villain”** – Every dramatic story needs a bad actor. Your villain could be “changes in the status quo, economic times, market conditions” or the “competitive landscape.”
5. **“Turning point”** – This is the moment when the buyer understands that remaining with the status quo will cost more than purchasing your service.
6. **“Resolution”** – Demonstrate how, in your story, your solution came to the rescue and solved the problem facing the company. Keep this portion of the story brief. Show simply how buyers can use your offering to fix their problems.
7. **“Questions”** – The purpose of the insight scenario is to learn the buyer’s story. The most important part of this story will be the buyer’s “oil spills” – the primary problems you can fix. Ask questions to help buyers discover their story.

Incorporating Insight Scenarios

“An insight scenario [is] a flashlight... to illuminate hidden value...Create an insight scenario to make it known.”

“Many buyers can now be 60% of the way through a sales cycle before they engage a salesperson.”

“The best way to tell if you’ve written a memorable insight scenario is to tell it to a random salesperson and see if they can repeat it back to you after hearing it only once.”

Incorporating insight scenarios into your sales process – and using them during your meetings with buyers – involves seven steps, all “sales-methodology neutral”:

1. **“Value assumption”** – Present “three to five value hypotheses.” You can’t provide fresh insights about the client’s “known business issues” that you elicited during an exploratory discussion. The value assumptions you introduce should result in a meaningful dialogue. Introduce benchmark data or other pertinent information.
2. **“Listening for hidden value”** – Listen carefully to everything the buyer says, not only to explore the buyer’s situation, but also to identify value the buyer “has not yet fully recognized.” Learn everything you can about the customer’s buying vision. Stay “completely present” as you listen.
3. **“Increase contrast with insight scenarios”** – Do not directly discuss buyers’ “value gap,” or their commercial problem. Instead, introduce an insight scenario. Your goal is to get buyers to recognize themselves in your story. You want buyers to assume ownership of their problems. Include a simply drawn before-and-after picture. Before: The buyer drowning in a problem. After: The buyer benefiting from your rescue. This illustrates the value of your product or service.
4. **“Listen for clarity”** – The insight scenario should elicit the “buyer’s story.” Once the buyer’s vision becomes clear, discuss your specific solution. If you cannot quantify the negative financial impact of the buyer’s problems, try to qualify them. For example, ask the buyer to list his problems on a one-to-ten scale.
5. **“Increase clarity with questions”** – Ask questions to help buyers “fill in the details” so they see your value as specific, not generic.
6. **“Solution”** – By this stage, you hope, the buyer finally sees things your way. “Present your solution.” Provide the purchaser with “proof points” so that he or she can justify a purchase.
7. **“Echo letter”** – After your meeting, send the buyer a letter referring to the “new buying vision.” Keep in mind that the buyer may share your letter with others.

Trusted Counsel

Insight scenarios allow you to transcend a typical salesperson’s role. An insight scenario lets you lead the buyer to value instead of leading with value. This lets you become the buyer’s “wise guide.” It transforms the purchaser from active critic to enthusiastic participant in the buying process.

About the Author

Michael Harris is the CEO of Insight Demand, a firm which teaches salespeople to deliver insights to buyers so they can sell value and differentiate their offerings.

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