

Introduction

Developers and salespeople are two very different species.

Aside from the varied personality differences, sales and engineering speak on contrasting levels. On many sales calls, there is a need for these two opposites to join forces to win a client over. So what can a developer do to get through unharmed and help close the deal? In this article, I'll give you some tips that might help you survive your next sales call.

Navigating the Sales Call

Whether it's as a sales engineer or the person actually closing the deal, developers are often brought into the mysterious and bewildering world of the sales team. For many enterprise deals, the discussions inevitably become technical, and developers are tasked with making the client comfortable with the solution, answering many questions along the way. While this may seem a bit frightening for many, there are a number of tips I've learned over the years that might help you navigate these mine fields and walk away in one piece..

Credit: <http://www.websitemagazine.com/content/blogs/posts/archive/2016/09/22/6-tips-for-developers-to-survive-a-sales-call.aspx>

1. Do your homework

Before any developer is brought into a call, they should have an idea of what it is they will be talking about. You, as a developer, should be aware of who is going to be on the call and what their level of technical expertise is. Engineers are often added to handle any high-level questions and reassure the client that a solution is possible. Understanding that solution is key to gaining the client's trust and helping get the sale. Also, you should be aware of all the systems and applications that will be involved. Having this knowledge will give the client a full understanding of the project and what it will take to complete it..

2. Know your role

Depending on the type of project and client, developers may be asked to fill different roles for a sales engagement. In some cases, you are there just to make the client feel better with the knowledge that a technical expert is on the call. Other times, you are asked to step up the plate and take over, guiding the discussion in a particular way to achieve a specific goal. You should always work with your sales team to know which role you will be filling. If the client is particularly wary of the proposed solution, you may be asked to elaborate on certain areas to reassure them of success. Understanding your role is key to aligning your efforts with the account executive to win the sale..

3. Learn the lingo

If you've ever been involved in the fields of medical or government, you'll know that they have unique languages for their systems and processes. It's key that a developer on a sales call is aware of the specific terminology that the client uses and understands. Trying to explain a solution or system to someone with the wrong terms can quickly derail a conversation and lead to disaster. You should talk with the account rep and do your research on the client's business and industry to make sure you speak the same language as them..

4. Cruise at 30,000 feet

One of my personal traits on a sales call used to be to get too technical. It was just my nature. As soon as I started hearing about a problem, I was always already architecting a solution in my head. While those thoughts and discussion are essential for the project, they don't belong on a call with the marketing and sales teams. Using too-technical language and terms can be off putting to some and confusing to just about everyone. You should keep your comments high-level and general. Be careful how technical you get, even when asked directly. There will be plenty of time for those discussions down the road, so keep it in check during the sales engagements..

5. Be honest, but be cautious

Another fatal mistake a developer can make on a sales call is to elaborate the truth and oversell. I've cringed when I've heard a developers throw out flippant comments about how easy or quick something can be accomplished. Even if it's true, these comments can force a company into a tough situation and commit them to deliver more than they expected. Always be honest on your sales calls, and only say what is necessary to build trust and close the deal. If you are asked about a topic you're not familiar with, never say you are an expert on it. You are better off letting them know you'll do your research and get back to them rather than trying to come up with an answer on the spot..

6. Get ready for a curve ball

Even with all the preparation in the world, you will always get a question on a sales call that you weren't expecting. It may be about importing data from an in-house system to a technology you had no idea was part of the project. Always remember your audience, and give an answer that addresses the concern but still leaves you and your team open to a discover phase to find out more about it.

Another possibility is joining a call where you expect to be a passive listener and are handed the reins to take over. More than once, I have joined a call expecting to be there simply for support and ended up taking over the entire conversation. Developers always need to be prepared for these types of surprises because sometimes it's those changes that help win the client over and build trust..

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