

THE INTERNATIONAL

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# Competing against “do nothing”



 Bob Apollo

If you're involved in complex sales in a B2B environment, your most significant competitor is almost certainly not another vendor, but the status quo. According to the latest findings from Sirius Decisions, Sales Benchmark Index and many other respected researchers, an increasingly common outcome for even well-qualified sales opportunities is not a win, or a competitive loss, but a decision to “do nothing”.

It's not hard to understand why. Faced with a generally risk-averse business climate, and with more stakeholders than ever involved in the typical buying-decision process, it's often easier for prospective customers to conclude – after an apparently thorough consideration of the alternatives – that their least-risky option is simply to stick with what they already have.

## Valuing the problem

There's a simple rule at play here: where there is no compelling case for change, the status quo is likely to prevail. As vendors, we've got to put a value on our prospect's problem before we can put a value on our solution. We've got to make sure that our salespeople fully explore their prospect's pains – and their potential gains – before they rush to prescribe our products or services.

And we've got to help our prospect to establish a clear value gap between their current situation and where they recognise that they need to be. If there is no value gap – or if the value gap is insignificant – the prospect is probably going to stick with the status quo, no

matter how good the solution fit.

That's why one of the most important roles of any first-line sales manager is to ensure that their salespeople have qualified whether their prospects are really motivated to do anything. And we can only make that judgement if we have fully explored the costs and consequences of inaction – and made sure that a clear and compelling case for change exists.

I'm no great fan of the increasingly archaic BANT approach to opportunity qualification, for reasons that I may explore in a future article. Yet, even if the opportunity appears to tick all of the BANT boxes (Budget, Authority, Need and Timeframe), we still need to make sure that both we and the prospect understand why sticking with the status quo would be the worst possible option.

We need to take the time to fully understand what would happen if the prospect's current situation continued into the future. What avoidable (and preferably rapidly accumulating) costs might be incurred? What valuable opportunities might be missed? Who else within their organisation might be affected? What risks might the organisation be exposed to?

## Shaping the agenda

How can we present the costs and consequences so as to persuade the prospect that they simply cannot afford not to take action? How can we weave both rational and emotional motivations into a compelling case for change? This is not simply a way of qualifying out opportunities that are unlikely to do

## About the author

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anything: it's also a way of helping to shape your prospect's agenda.

## Actions

If you are determined to cut down on all those wasted resources that are currently being ploughed into projects that end up going nowhere, you need to first recognise that “doing nothing” is one of your most insidious competitors. You need to coach, train and equip your salespeople to resist the itch to pitch and focus instead on the need for change.

And please, don't just ask your salespeople when an opportunity is going to close and what their chances of winning are; make sure you also ask them why their prospect should do anything at all, and why their need is urgent. And, if you don't get the answers you want, you need to get your salespeople to go back and requalify their opportunities again.