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What is the Appropriate Length for a Thirty-Second Commercial?

No, it's not a trick question. Hopefully though, it's a thought-provoking one.

The objective of a “30-second commercial” or “elevator pitch,” whatever you choose to call it, is to achieve one thing—initiate a conversation. So, how long should it take to accomplish that? Is 30 seconds long enough? Is it too long? Too short, perhaps?

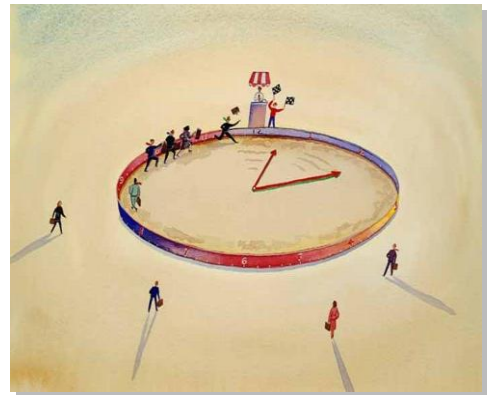
If you suspect that the time element—whether it's 15 seconds, 30 seconds, or 67.3814 seconds—is not so important, you're correct. Time is not the benchmark; it's what you say, how you say it, and more importantly, the reaction it elicits from the prospect that really counts.

Since the objective is to initiate a conversation with your prospect, your commercial should be delivered in a conversational tone...as if you were talking to a friend or colleague. You shouldn't sound like an infomercial announcer, barking the unique aspects of your product at an unsuspecting prospect, nor should you sound like an unimpassioned college professor, lecturing on the benefits of your product and the advantages that will accrue to its users. Instead, keep your message simple and brief. Focus on the one aspect of your product or service that your research and experience indicates is likely to be of greatest interest to the prospect. Then, boil it down to one thought that you can articulate in a conversational manner—an idea the prospect can absorb and understand quickly. Here's an example:

We provide international freight forwarding services for several large companies who rely on us to not only expedite their overseas shipments, but do so at substantially lower costs than they were accustomed to.

One idea: faster shipments at lower costs. If the prospect is at all interested in efficiency and profitability, he's likely to engage in a conversation.

So, don't be so concerned about the length of your “pitch”; focus on the content. And, keep it to the point—one thought. If your commercial sparks the prospect's curiosity to know more about what you do or how you do it, you've accomplished your goal—to start a conversation.

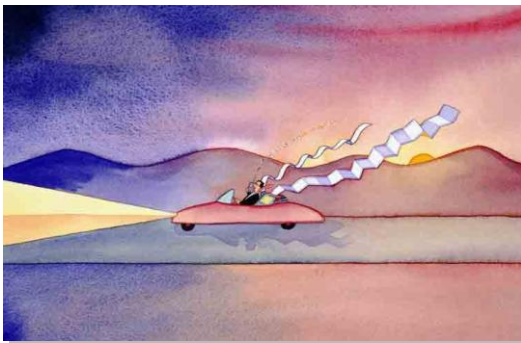


Which Way to Easy Street?

Common sense would dictate that it's impossible to reap the rewards of your efforts if you don't actually exert the effort. So, why do some salespeople, perhaps many, believe that they can grow their client base, close more sales, and earn more money without doing the work, sometimes hard work, associated with those accomplishments? Perhaps Voltaire had the answer when he observed that "Common sense is not so common."

No investment—no reward.

You won't grow your client base without actively and consistently engaging in the activities that will put you in contact with potential clients (for example: proactive prospecting, networking, obtaining referrals, and forming strategic alliances). And, you definitely won't grow your client base by sitting at your desk waiting for marketing or advertising leads to come in and direct you toward hot, or even luke-warm, prospects.



You won't grow sales with existing clients unless you invest the time to know their businesses as well as, or perhaps better than, they know their businesses so you can discover additional opportunities for your product or service. Of course, you can sit at your desk and wait for your clients to make the discovery...and hope they contact you before contacting your competition.

Identifying potential new clients and new opportunities with existing clients won't guarantee more sales (and more commission for you) unless you can effectively develop those opportunities in a timely manner. That means putting every opportunity under the microscope; identifying every aspect of it to make sure it meets the benchmarks defined by your selling process; and investing your time and energy in those that truly measure up and reject the ones that don't. Sounds like work, doesn't it?

More clients, more sales, more money—it takes work: effort and energy. And, it takes a commitment to do what needs to be done...without excuses. There's no free lunch. But, once you've paid the price...enjoy the meal.

Do You Have To Be An Expert?

Are you avoiding a task (for example: calling on a particular group of prospects, writing an article for a trade publication, or giving a speech to an organization) simply because you didn't consider yourself an expert in the particular endeavor? Perhaps, the perceived complexity of the learning process or amount of time it would take to become an "expert" has discouraged you from making any attempt.

Do you have to be an expert?

Are you an expert driver capable of taking a Formula 1 car around a 14-turn Grand Prix track at 200+mph (without damaging the car...or yourself)? Probably not. But, I'll bet you can competently drive your car, day to day, to get where you need to go.

Are you an expert chef capable of whipping up a gourmet meal for 14 guests with only three hours notice? Again, I suspect not. However, I'll bet that you can toss a salad, broil a few steaks, bake a few potatoes, and steam some vegetables competently enough to even please your in-laws. (OK, that may be stretching it...but you get the point.)

The same applies to speech making, article writing, and prospecting. You don't have to be an expert; you only have to be competent—in many cases, only somewhat competent.

But, you'll never become competent without first "giving it a try." If you've been putting off writing that article or outlining that speech or developing that compelling prospecting strategy, stop procrastinating and just start. Ask a friend or colleague to review your work and make suggestions. With a little effort...and faith, it will come together.

No one starts out as an expert; they must first develop competency. And, no one develops competency without first starting out. So, what are you waiting for?

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