Better Together: Competitive Agents and Competitive Climate in the Agency
Keith A. Richards, PhD, Wyatt A. Schrock, PhD Candidate, Douglas E. Hughes, PhD, Frank Q. Fu, PhD, and Eli Jones, PhD

Understanding Client Attitudes
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How Does Reinterpretation Influence Our First Impressions?
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The Wrong Ladder: Mismatch Between Subgoal Sequences and Actual Goal Performance
Liyin Jin, PhD, Qian Xu, PhD, and Ying Zhang, PhD

Developing a Winning Theme or The Attention Getter
Charles Fifield, MBA

Trust in Leadership and Authenticity in Real Estate
Amanda Rodriguez, MBA

INSIDER: Stretch: Extending Your Professional Expiration Date
Jack Kohles, MBA Candidate

INSIDER: Get Set, Reset, Go
Erick Huntley, MBA Candidate
Developing a Winning Theme or The Attention Getter
Charles Fifield, MBA

Standing out from the competition by initially capturing the attention and the imagination of the buyer can oftentimes decide the fate of a sales call. Sometimes referred to as the attention getter or the opener, the theme offered at the beginning of a sales call is vitally important. Developed effectively, it should begin the win-win sales call objective with the buyer wanting to hear more. Salespeople and real estate agents must open selling interactions with a clear and relevant offering that not only gains some interest, but instantly establishes in the buyer some desire, which is communicated verbally and/or non-verbally, to learn more.

What’s a Theme and Why is it Important to a Successful Sales Call?

Successful personal selling embodies the telling of a story -- how selected features/capabilities, including the salesperson, the salesperson’s company, and the salesperson’s product or service, can enable a buyer to overcome defined challenges or gain missed opportunities in such a way that your customer realizes incremental value. It’s really a process that evolves from the salesperson gaining the buyer’s “eager wants” and then leading the buyer through a matchmaking dialogue of showing how the salesperson’s or agent’s capabilities, including supporting validation, supply the right solution. The story hopefully ends with the happy ending for all participating parties with a value summary discussion followed by the implementation.

A theme is the “central idea” or common thread of the story you are offering. Establishing a theme requires some careful pre-call planning in many cases so that your proposed theme is not too general and is relevant to the buyer’s probable “wants.” Winning themes somehow capture what the buyer cares about the most, and are basically the foundation upon which you will build a compelling customer-focused story with a happy or productive ending. They are not broad generalities or empty slogans. Examples of what themes are not include:

- Best value
- Living in style
- A better property
Developing a Winning Theme or The Attention Getter

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- Unlimited potential
- We will help you
- Exceptional living awaits

How does a Salesperson or Agent Deliver a Successful Attention Getter?

Attention getters or themes can be delivered in different ways, including a product opening, a question opening, a re-statement opening, an initial benefit statement opening (IBS), and a referral opening that also offers an IBS.

- The product opening must have a sensory-driven compelling feature.
- The question opening must cause curiosity, but not frustration.
- The re-statement opening summarizes in question form what was learned at a prior meeting between the buyer and seller or what may have been discussed on the phone that gained the buyer’s curiosity in the first place.
- An IBS is simply a summary of the projected benefits to be achieved at the conclusion of this exchange, and it is often offered in the context of referencing similar or like-kind buyers with whom the seller has had success and can be validated, if necessary.
- The referral opening can be an instant attention getter and trust builder; however, without some supporting proof point with an IBS addition, it fails to develop a theme.

To be effective, the attention getter should connect the to-be-offered capabilities or features with the buyer’s anticipated wants, and incorporate proof points or validation. In other words, it must always be benefit-based and begin shaping the seller’s response to the buyer’s key decision-making question, *What's in it for me?* The proposed theme effectively and efficiently connects what’s important to a buyer (benefits) with what’s important to the seller (capabilities/features) to communicate implied solutions or to garner missed opportunities and generate the beginning of buying interest. The seller’s challenge is to devise an effective and compelling way to do this without sounding empty, boastful or “too much” while being easy to understand or contemplate.

The Evolution of a Theme

The theme example follows an evolutionary path from a poorly drafted theme (Version 1), and ending with a theme that contains all of the necessary elements (Version 5).
Version 1  Exceptional living awaits.  
This theme is nothing more than a re-statement of a basic requirement.

Version 2  Newly renovated & energy-efficient living awaits.  
This theme attempts to cater the features to the specific targeted buyer.

Version 3  Newly renovated & energy-efficient living reduces maintenance and costs.  
This theme includes a more specific feature and a link between the feature and the anticipated benefits.

Version 4  Newly renovated & solar energy-efficient living reduces maintenance and related costs by 50%.  
The feature is more specific and the metric quantifies the benefit to some degree, but it does not constitute real proof or validation.

Version 5  Newly renovated & solar energy-efficient living reduces maintenance and related costs by thousands of dollars per year, according to the Department of Energy.  
This theme puts all of the pieces together. The differentiator in Version 4 is refined and quantified in a more meaningful fashion, and it also offers a significant validation or proof component.

Summary

Although the setting of a theme or the delivery of an attention-getter sounds pretty simple and certainly establishes a foundation for the story to follow, most proposal themes are either underdeveloped or simply missing altogether from sales calls. The theme or attention-getter is critical to getting the sales call into a path of progress. Without it, the sales call tends to wander and then almost by default introduce feature dumping as a makeshift solution to failing to have a well-defined direction. The components of winning sales call themes can be delivered in a variety of ways, but should contain three essential ingredients: features/capabilities, projected benefits, and validation or proof points.
Recommended Reading


About the Author

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Chuck Fifield is a Senior Lecturer for Baylor University’s Hankamer School of Business, Marketing Department and serves as the faculty coach to Baylor’s Sales Team. He joined the faculty at Baylor University in 2001, teaching in the Graduate Business School (Operations Management), the Management Department (Negotiations and Conflict Resolution) and the Economics Department (Principles of Macroeconomics). Chuck has taught or guest lectured at other Texas-based Universities in the fields of sales, international business, money and banking and finance/investments. Professor Fifield has conducted sales research and training for several organizations, including most recently State Farm Insurance. Prior to joining Baylor, Chuck was a financial consultant for nearly thirty years to businesses located throughout the U.S. He owned and operated several financial service businesses in the fields of securities, real estate, oil and gas and insurance.