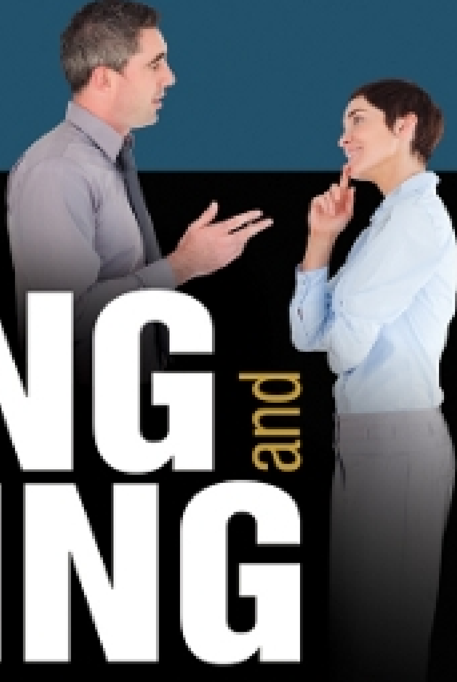

BUYING and SELLING INFORMATION

A Guide for **Information Professionals** and **Salespeople** to BUILD MUTUAL SUCCESS

MICHAEL L. GRUENBERG

BUYING and SELLING INFORMATION

BUYING and SELLING INFORMATION

A Guide for Information Professionals and Salespeople to BUILD MUTUAL SUCCESS

Michael L. Gruenberg

Information Today, Inc.
Medford, New Jersey

First printing, 2014

Buying and Selling Information: A Guide for Information Professionals and Salespeople to Build Mutual Success

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Printed and bound in the United States of America

President and CEO: Thomas H. Hogan, Sr.
Editor-in-Chief and Publisher: John B. Bryans
VP Graphics and Production: M. Heide Dengler
Project Editor: Marydee Ojala
Cover Design: Lisa Conroy
Book Design: Kara Mia Jalkowski

infotoday.com

Contents

Foreword

One of the greatest professional pleasures is to share in the excitement when a colleague succeeds, and it is even greater when the colleague is a longtime friend. I greatly admire what my friend and colleague Michael Gruenberg has done with *Buying and Selling Information*.

Few subjects in our profession are more needing of attention than the relationship between those providing the products required for library clients and users, and those of us who are responsible for acquiring them.

Whether we are employed as information professionals (the term Mike and many in specialized librarianship use), specialist librarians, strategic knowledge professionals, knowledge strategists, knowledge executives, or any of the other occupations that fall somewhere among the myriad and wide-ranging lines of work relating to information and knowledge transfer, we hope to operate in trusting and practical relationships. If we do not, our clients and users are shortchanged. Thanks to Mike's good book, we now have expert guidance about how to work with our vendors—and how they can work with us.

Practical and actionable advice about the relationship between the information/knowledge practitioner and the vendor has long been neglected. For those of us who have been practicing for some time (I was a specialist librarian before becoming a consultant and a teacher), the solution was often catch-as-catch-can, or "learn on the job"—not the healthiest of arrangements, in terms of benefits to clients and users.

Part of the blame lays with our graduate programs, for few of them—even those teaching management to budding information and knowledge professionals—give attention to the practitioner–vendor relationship. And it is a rare occasion indeed for those moving into our profession to be given the opportunity to learn about such subjects as negotiation, contract reviews, pricing structures, sales cycles, and interactions with colleagues at trade shows (which most professionals tend to think of as conferences or, abroad, as congresses). In this book, Mike provides practical and actionable advice on these matters. From my point of view, this book should be added to the graduate curriculum for any line of work to which information and knowledge professionals aspire.

One of the great joys of Mike's book is the way he incorporates his longtime passion for popular music. It's a real treat to see the references and the connections he uses to link popular music with the varying subject matter. Through these musical anecdotes (in which his expertise is well recognized), we're given charming and truly fun links to information—and even solutions—for the issues discussed throughout the book.

The book is valuable for many reasons, some of which could be elaborated upon, but the best simply come to us as we read what Mike has written. The advice is solid ("We put ourselves in the customer's place.") and the storytelling is terrific. Embracing what we learn from this book in our working lives will open our minds to many new concepts about our and our vendors' expectations. The attention Mike gives to the value of change management and the role of leadership in our professional lives is right on target. We need to hear what he has to say.

With this book, Mike has made an important contribution to the professional literature for those who manage, what is called by many, the knowledge domain. Those of us working in the knowledge domain are well served when we read—and heed—*Buying and Selling Information*.

—Guy St. Clair

Guy St. Clair is president and knowledge services evangelist for SMR International, a New York-based consulting practice focused on change and its impact on people, organizational effectiveness, and the management of intellectual capital within the larger enterprise. He serves as special advisor to Soutron Global, the cloud-based information management and knowledge services solutions provider dedicated to implementing library transformation. At Columbia University in New York, Guy is lecturer and subject matter expert for Columbia's Master of Science in Information and Knowledge Strategy program. He is a past-president of the Special Libraries Association (SLA) and the author of *SLA's Centennial History, SLA at 100: From "Putting Knowledge to Work" to Building the Knowledge Culture* (Alexandria, VA: Special Libraries Association, 2009).

Introduction

My career in the information industry began with a phone call to a friend:

> "Hi Steve, this is Mike Gruenberg. It's been a while since we last spoke."
>
> "Hi Mike, it's great to hear from you again. How are you doing? It's been at least 2 years since I last saw you," he said in a welcoming manner. "So, what's going on in your life?"

What's going on in my life? I asked myself. Where should I start? And with those four words, without my knowing it, the very early seeds of this book began to take root.

I first met Steve Goldspiel when we taught school together in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. After getting married, I earned my masters in educational administration and supervision, which allowed me to become permanently certified as a principal in the New York State School system.

Steve, on the other hand, went from teaching to working in an insurance and brokerage business for a few years. That didn't work out, so he got a job as a salesman. He explained to me on the phone that the product he was selling was financial information filed by public companies at the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. The information was contained in books and microfiche, and it was sold to librarians at financial institutions.

I told Steve that literally on the same day I received my principal's certification, I was informed that, due to the seriousness of the New York City budget crisis, my job had been eliminated. Since that fateful day, I had endured a series of unfulfilling positions as a substitute teacher at various schools in Brooklyn and Queens.

Steve was one of those people who always had a lot of creative ideas and seemingly knew many people across a variety of industries. I explained to him that I had recently gotten married and my wife and I wanted to start a family, but not having a permanent job was making it difficult to plan ahead.

"Do you have any advice as to my next move in finding a job? Do you know anyone I could call to help me?" I asked him.

Without hesitation, he strongly suggested that I become a salesperson. He had just been promoted to New York regional sales manager for his company, and there was an opening in that office for a salesperson.

And from that moment, everything changed in my life:

> "You think I can be a salesperson?" I said incredulously.
>
> "You are a natural salesperson," he replied.
>
> "But, Steve, I'm not sure that I want to be a salesperson, and I don't even know the first thing about how to sell!" I stated emphatically.
>
> "Yes, you do know how to sell," Steve replied. "I think you can be very successful as a salesperson, and I am expecting you to meet me at my office on Monday at 11 AM for an interview. If you still really hate the idea after I explain the opportunity to you, then at the very least, we'll have lunch together," he said.

As I hung up the phone, I had no inkling as to what that appointment would mean for me in relation to the rest of my life. I showed up at his office, interviewed for the job, and enjoyed a visit with my old friend. He had this incredible quality of making you feel that you were the most important person in the room. Even though I hadn't seen or spoken to him for at least 2 years, it was as though we had been together just the day before.

By the end of lunch, I was enthused, confused, and overwhelmed with the possibilities of what I might be able to accomplish as a salesperson. On January 3, 1977, I became a full-fledged salesman for a company called Disclosure. I worked many years for Steve, who later became the president of the company. This man, my friend and mentor, guided my professional development from salesperson to vice president of sales. I spent 20 years at Disclosure, working with the most talented and dedicated staff of professionals. It was a privilege to work there.

What I thought was going to be a 6-month, stop-gap interlude, leading me back to a teaching appointment, turned into a lifetime career in sales. It's a job that has taken me to libraries, universities, and speaking engagements all over the world. It has afforded me a lifestyle and income that I could never have imagined or duplicated as a teacher. My time spent in sales and sales management have thus far given me 35 years of cherished experiences and promises an even brighter outlook for the future.

This book is meant to guide salespeople and information professionals through the process of successfully buying and selling information. This is not just another "rules of the game" book written by someone who never did it: It is based on the real-life stories, situations, and experiences that I coped with, analyzed, and figured out. It explains how these lessons helped build my career and earn the trust of my customers.

A word about the terminology used in the book: A person who sells a product or service to the library is referred to here as the salesperson, sales rep, or rep. All these terms refer to the one person who has products/services/databases to sell. Similarly, the person who buys the products/services/databases is referred to in the book as an information professional, info pro, or librarian.

In the chapters that follow, you will discover how the participants in the process of buying and selling data can work together—not as adversaries, but as a team. I will cover how each individual—information professional or salesperson—can effectively prepare for a successful sales meeting, and what both parties should do both during and after the meeting to make it relevant and valuable to both (e.g., what is appropriate in terms of follow-up, and how you can negotiate to create a win–win situation). There is information on tools, tactics, and advice—all drawn from my own personal experiences.

By understanding what the salesperson is trying to accomplish and the steps he is taking to achieve that goal, information professionals will know what to be aware of and how to prepare for a sales meeting, to make the meeting and follow-up productive for both parties. Furthermore, the information professional can ask, What lessons have I learned from the salesperson who just visited me? How can I apply that knowledge to improve my dealings with the departments and people within my library?

To me, writing music and building business relationships share some remarkable similarities. Although it's been reported that The Rolling Stones' Keith Richards and Mick Jagger composed "Satisfaction" in 20 minutes in the middle of the night, writing a song is typically a longer process. The composer often initially experiments with various themes and melodies before attempting to match lyrics to the notes. It's a process that can take as little as a few hours or as long as a few years. The composer and/or lyricist will take as much time as is necessary to get it right.

Much like writing a song, building a successful business relationship can take many years of trial and error. Sometimes sales reps and their customers have differences of opinion. That doesn't mean one is right and the other is wrong. It just means that in order to successfully complete their business dealings, each one has to work with diligence to understand the goals and objectives of the other. Salespeople will do their best to overcome objections while information professionals will deliberate over the relative worth of the product being presented. A strong business relationship is the result of many years of working together.

Because crafting a song and building a business relationship are so similar, I have chosen to begin each chapters of Buying and Selling Information with a brief mention of a song that, for me, reflects the topic to be discussed. I hope the songs that I have chosen evoke pleasant memories for all of you.

Finally, throughout the book, I feature many personal stories. They are a compilation of my varied experiences and the myriad people I have had the pleasure of meeting. Every story is based on actual events.

CHAPTER 8

What a Typical Sales Call Looks Like

In "The Word," written by Lennon/McCartney, the Beatles sing: "Say the word and you'll be free. Say the word and be like me. Say the word I'm thinking of." At a sales meeting, the word the rep is thinking about is probably not the same one the customer is thinking about. Words can flow in many different directions unless attention is paid to the structure the meeting.

Before the Sales Call Begins

In expectation of the sales call, information professionals and sales reps should think about what they expect to learn from the other party. Both the rep and the info pro need to come to the meeting prepared to do business with one another. Both should have goals and objectives in mind before they ever sit across the table from one another. At this initial meeting, the rep is going to probe to see if the product she thinks could be applicable actually is. The information professional should approach the meeting in a similar manner—to find out if that product that piqued his interest can fit the needs of the library. In essence, they are both attending the meeting for the same purpose. It's a discovery meeting. Without an assessment of the cold hard facts each person can gain as a result of this meeting, nothing can be bought or sold.

So how do the rep and the info pro get the data they need to make the all-important assessment? Each must come prepared to the meeting with a specific set of questions to ask the other. By carefully reviewing the answers to those questions, each can decide what the next steps should be.

Here are some questions for info pros to think about prior to meeting with salespeople:

1. Are you in avoidance mode when a salesperson calls? If so, you need to change that stance since it does no one any good. Be open to the possibilities.
2. How proactive are you in understanding the current product mix being of new products available on the market today? (Your organization expects you to know the “latest and greatest.”)
3. Have you reviewed any improvements to the products made by this vendor?
4. Do you have the negotiation skills to get the best value from the product *and* the salesperson?
5. Do you view the salesperson as an enemy or an ally? Which relationship will benefit you the most?
6. How can the salesperson help you in analyzing and understanding your costs?
7. Have you developed advocates within your organization?
8. Are you prepared with the pertinent questions for your meeting?

Aside from asking questions related to content, the info pro should be constantly assessing the rep:

1. Does your salesperson fully understand the product being presented to you? In other words, do you feel comfortable that this person really knows the product he is presenting to you?

2. Can you clearly inform the rep about the buying procedures of your organization?

3. Did the salesperson send an agenda to you at least one week in advance of the meeting? If so, was it to your satisfaction? Did you not receive an agenda but had asked for one?

On the other side of the table, the salesperson can use his own set of guidelines to make the meeting productive:

1. What is the objective of the meeting? Renewal, new business, strategic, specific problem?
2. Was an agenda sent in advance of the meeting, including topics to be covered?
3. What are the anticipated key questions I can expect from the client, and how will those questions be answered? Or, put in a less delicate manner, what are the five worst questions that this librarian can ask me?
4. Did I consult with the appropriate product manager prior to the call, and does that person need to be at the meeting too?
5. What is the buying cycle of the client? If a new product is presented at the meeting and the client ostensibly likes it, how long will it take for the order to be signed? Are there other decision-makers that need to be contacted at this time? What is the buying process?
6. Are there other opportunities for more of our company's products at this institution? Have I researched the institution's website for that information?
7. Are there any significant events at the institution that may impact new sales or renewal?

8. If this is a large institution, how many appointments will there be that day in addition to the librarian, and with whom?
9. What is the closing strategy for this call?
10. Are there any technical support issues?
11. What are the next steps?

Structure of a Sales Call

If the sales call is properly managed by the sales rep, a typical meeting—if there is such a thing—should usually take an hour or less (unless the librarian and the rep are engaged in high-level negotiations) and is divided into four separate parts:

1. Introductions (10 minutes)
2. Fact-finding (30 minutes)
3. Review and Demonstrations (10 minutes): Here is the point in the sales call where the rep summarizes all answers, which are then confirmed by the customer. There is the possibility of a brief demo.
4. Wrap-up (5 minutes): The meeting should end with both parties going over their individual to-do lists and making plans for the next meeting.

Introductions

Introductions make up the first 5 to 10 minutes. If it is the first time the rep and librarian are meeting, then some type of introductory conversation is required. Maybe it's a word of thanks from the rep to acknowledge the librarian's efforts to make time for the meeting. Maybe it's a few words about a colleague of the librarian who suggested the meeting take place. Or maybe it's just a discussion about the weather. No matter what the topic, it's good to start with a conversation that is not business oriented as you both settle in. People doing business need to feel comfortable with one another before products, terms, and costs are ever brought to the table.

Some reps feel the need to get right into the meeting objectives without any small talk. I have always cautioned against this approach because it means both the rep and the information professional miss the opportunity to get to know one another. Unless the rep's sole purpose is to "make a sale and run," not understanding the likes and dislikes of a potential customer is dangerous and short-sighted. All the sales organizations that I have been affiliated with encouraged their salespeople to develop a close working relationship with their customers. They can do that by showing interest in their customers. Databases, and related technical and legal issues, will obviously be discussed later at the meeting, so the rep should try to understand the person with whom he is speaking at the outset of the meeting.

Since sales is a job that attracts gregarious people, some sales reps may take this introductory phase a bit too literally. Sales reps can certainly talk about their summer vacation in the Napa Valley but needn't relive their experiences at every vineyard that offered a wine tasting. The information professional should steer the conversation away from non-business issues if the rep seems intent on using the entire time for small talk.

Fact-Finding

The second part of the call is fact-finding, which should occupy the majority of the time, approximately 20 to 30 minutes. The rep should develop 10 to 15 questions to ascertain the needs of the librarian. At this point, there should be no demos, just questions and answers. In sales talk, this is an example of the consultative sales method. It is only after using this approach that the rep can even begin to think about offering a solution. Here are the types of questions that a librarian may be asked by the rep to determine need:

- Tell me about the work you do here.
- Are you satisfied with the service and data you are currently receiving from our company? How can we manage the relationship more effectively to ensure your satisfaction?
- Is your library serving your constituents 24/7? How is that working in relation to staffing? Are you effectively completing all the requested research?
- What is giving you the most "pain" in your daily activities as you serve the information needs of your internal clients here at the library?
- What are your long-term goals in the dissemination of information for your organization?
- Do you have responsibility for research globally, or just in North America?
- Who are the key buyers of information in your organization? If we can demonstrate today that our information products have real relevance for you, how would these types of products be purchased?
- Can you tell me a little bit about the budget process?
- Are there CRM or tech people who need to get involved in the eventual purchase of the data?
- I noticed on your website that your library has a commitment to XYZ. Are you aware that we have many information products that deal with that in addition to the one you asked to see today?

Once the questions have been answered, it's up to the rep to review the answers with the information professional for clarity and accuracy as the next step unfolds. There are many more questions that could be asked, but 10 to 15 pertinent questions will give the salesperson a good idea of the needs of the library.

The sales rep is also an educator who helps the librarian to understand the nuances of the product. The rep may know of special deals and promotions that can be of great service to the information professional, in terms of both the usefulness of the data being presented and budgetary considerations. The buyer needs to understand how the product will meet the needs of the organization.

The librarian should have questions prepared as well. Conceptually, information professionals have to understand both their role and the role of the salesperson. Simply stated, one person sells and the other one buys.

Here are some questions that the librarian may ask of the sales rep:

- How does the coverage in this product compare to your competitors' products?
- Given that this is a new offering from your company, can you tell me about the research that went into its development?
- What is your commitment to service? We service branch libraries throughout the world. Are your customer service people available 24/7?
- If the technology associated with this product fails to operate effectively, what recourse is available to me from your company?
- What type of training do you provide?
- If I am interested in the product, can you give me more than just a 30-day trial?
- I'd like to have an open house at the library and feature your product for everyone to test it out. Will you be here for that day?
- If I am completely dissatisfied after a month or two, can I have my money back?

Review and Demonstrations

The next step in the sales meeting process is time for clarification, which should take 10 minutes. What was said? What was promised? What's next? All of these questions need to be answered.

Reading from her notes, the sales rep may say:

> "John, you indicated that your library runs 24 hours a day Monday through Friday, and from 8 AM to 8 PM on the weekends, servicing the U.S. and Canada. Is that correct?"
>
> "That's correct, Alice. We are well covered in North America, but our European library based in Paris is closed on the weekends, and, with the time difference, we cannot solve the information needs of our European offices from North America on a timely basis," the librarian would reply.
>
> Alice might reply, "Our company is open 24/7 and, as such, can cover the worldwide needs of your organization."

The rep will summarize the answers from the early part of the meeting and make sure that the information professional is in agreement as to the outstanding issues.

This could also be the time in the meeting for a demo of the product discussed. However, not all reps are proficient on all products, and therefore a demo should usually be left to the company's appropriate staff. Furthermore, it's best just to stay with the basics at this point, since no substantive plans for purchase have been discussed.

Under most circumstances, this is not the time to discuss price unless the rep knows how much funding is available, who the decision-makers are, and when a final decision will be made. Even if the information professional asks, "Can you give me a ballpark estimate of the cost to buy the databases you just presented?" the rep should not answer, because even though every database product offered by a company has a list price, if the salesperson is not given context as to what the library has in its budget to spend, then any number thrown out there is meaningless. Here's an example of how such a conversation might go:

> "Joe, can you give me a ballpark figure on what that database could cost me?"
>
> "Around $10,000," the rep might say.
>
> "Yikes, I don't have that much to spend!" the librarian says, walking away and never revealing the actual amount allocated for the purchase.

Again, waiting until all the details are known by both parties is the best time to negotiate price.

Wrap-Up

At last, the sales rep has established a need, found out the approximate budget available for the purchase, ascertained the decision-making process, and suggested a product that would fill the needs of the library. At this point, the two parties will spend about 5 minutes wrapping things up, agreeing on their individual to-do lists and probably scheduling the next meeting or, at the very least, the next phone conversation.

Knowledge Points

- Both parties need to prepare a series of questions prior to the meeting.
- The information professional should ask just as many questions as the salesperson.
- If the rep takes out his laptop before asking at least 10 questions, the information professional should tell him to shut the device until he knows what the library wants.
- Every sales meeting has four parts: introductions, fact-finding, review and demonstrations, and wrap-up.
- The info pro cannot let a talkative sales rep stray too far from the agenda.
- When the info pro asks for a “ballpark price” the rep should resist unless all the other factors, such as budget, close date, and so on, are known.

About the Author

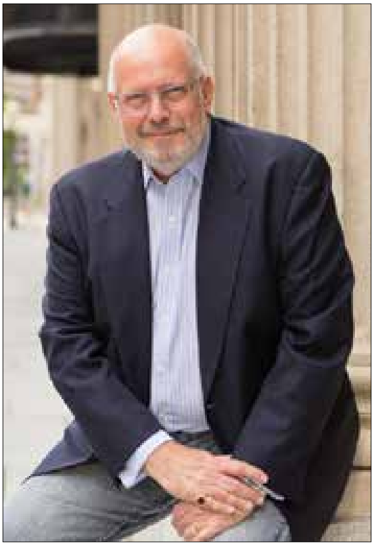

Photo by Scott Maynard

In the information services industry, the name **Mike Gruenberg** is synonymous with winning results—in sales team development and leadership, in performance and customer satisfaction, and in selling complex information services to demanding markets worldwide. Mike's track record of more than 30 years in the industry is headlined by the significant profit performance he has delivered in every position he has held. Many of the salespeople he has managed and mentored have gone on to highly successful careers.

Mike is currently the president of Gruenberg Consulting, LLC, a firm he founded in January 2012, devoted to providing information services companies with sales source analysis, market research, executive coaching, and trade show analysis. Moreover, he has developed a program to provide best practices advice for improving negotiation skills for information professionals.

Mike lives in North Bethesda, Maryland, with his wife Barbara. He is an avid lifelong collector of music recordings and, since 2000, a columnist for an online site devoted to the latest musical trends.

If you enjoyed reading this chapter of *Buying and Selling Information*, please visit the following retailers to pre-order your copy.