

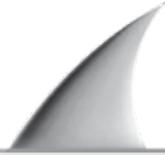


SHARK PITCH

How to Make a Shark
Sit Up and Beg to Buy
Your Product

Dennis Green & Mary Lou Green

Inventors of more than 50 simple products
with sales exceeding \$120 million



SHARK PITCH

How To Make a Shark Sit Up and Beg
to Buy Your Product

Dennis & Mary Lou Green

Lifelong Entrepreneurs & Founders of
BigIdeaSchool.com

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This book is not associated with the television show *Shark Tank*.

SHARK PITCH: How to Make a Shark Sit Up and Beg to Buy Your Product

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Dedication

Shark Pitch is dedicated to all of the sales reps we worked with for the past four decades and to the many buyers who gave us a place to sell our products. Thanks to the guys at CSA, Eric, Ed and Kevin, for showing us the ropes at QVC. Special thanks to Saul Licholat and Benson Goldenberg for helping us get off the ground in the very beginning. To Richard Dixon, our intrepid sales manager for many years, thanks for showing us that relationships are essential to selling, but no more important than getting up every day and making “the calls” even when your whole body aches.

Our deep gratitude to our friend Jim Fleming whose faith and initial investment in our Sneaker Balls injection mold made all the difference in getting our product out of our heads and into the world. Thanks to Fred Palmer for his design talent and good nature. Thanks to Jay Cogswell for helping us source products and to Steve Stoltz, Spencer Jorgenson and Noel Ginsburg for manufacturing our products with quality and precision. We could not have succeeded without you.

To our brilliant friends Robert Nelson and Peter Newman, thanks for sharing your knowledge of advertising and marketing. To Charles St. John and Hilary St. John, we appreciate your encouragement and pull-no-punches advice and feedback. Thanks to Kae Hammond and Joe Garrett for reading early versions of our manuscript and pushing us to finish. Special thanks to Karla Hawley for her indispensable and tireless copy editing and for holding our feet to the fire. Finally to our entrepreneurial son Dennis and our daughter-in-law Kat, and to all the other entrepreneurs and inventors out there who have dreams to fulfill, we hope *Shark Pitch* contributes in some small way to your success.

Table of Contents

The Purpose of this Book	1
How to Create an Irresistible Three-Step Pitch	5
The Simple, Effective Three-Step Pitch	8
Let Your Product Introduce Itself	10
Think of Your Pitch as a Silent Movie	11
Selling Is Serving	11
Don't Assume You Know What Buyers Want to Know	13
Empathy Selling Shows Respect	14
Chapter Takeaways	16
Be Prepared to Pitch	17
Pitch to Engage Rather Than Persuade	17
Study Your Target Before You Pitch	19
Be Prepared to Respond to Objections and Challenges.	22
Make a Buyer Want to Take Your Calls	24
Chapter Takeaways	26
Don't Make Pitching a Dirty Word	29
Make Your Product Fit Your Customer.	31
This Is Not About Instant Riches	32
Pitching Retailers Is Not Like Pitching in the Shark Tank	33
You Need Advocates to Work for You	34
How to Find a Sales Rep	35
Chapter Takeaways	37
Is Your Product Worth Pitching?	39
Great Products Are Easier to Pitch	40
Don't Repeat Our Early Mistakes	42
Simple Products Are Easy to Pitch	42

Is Your Big Idea Viable?	43
Why It's Dangerous to Fall in Love with Your Big Idea	44
What Type of Entrepreneur Are You?	46
Why You Need to Test Before You Invest	48
An Introduction to Testing Your Idea	49
Keep Others Informed of Your Progress	51
Chapter Takeaways	52
The Pain Piece of Your Pitch Formula	53
The Three Pillars of Pain	54
The OXO Ice Cream Scoop Example.	54
The Scrub Daddy Sponge Example	58
The Sneaker Balls Example	59
Chapter Takeaways:	62
The Pleasure Piece of Your Pitch Formula	63
How Apple® Creates Pleasure	64
Form Also Differentiates Your Product.	65
Cutting Boards Are Bought Based on Their Form.	65
How Distinctive Shape Can Be a Reason to Buy	66
Chapter Takeaways:	69
The Emotional Piece of Your Pitch Formula	71
How Products Express Our Needs	73
Maslow's Theory of Human Needs	74
Maslow's Hierarchy	75
The Difference Between Solving Problems and Satisfying Needs	77
Stress the Needs Your Product Satisfies.	79
Be Sure Your Product Fits Your Customers' Needs	80
Make Your Product a True Alternative	81
Chapter Takeaways	82

Pitching to Consumers on QVC	83
Required Benefits	85
The Subconscious Triggers in the Benefit Triangle	86
How We Pitched Pleasure Benefits to Sell ExtraLife	87
How We Pitched Emotional Benefits to Sell ExtraLife	88
Frame the Pitch to Match Perceived Needs	90
How We Tested Different Pitches	91
The Missing Piece of the Pitch Puzzle.	92
Chapter Takeaways	94
How to Test Your Pitch	95
A/B Testing Two Pitches On-Air	98
Chapter Takeaways	101
The Pitching Power of Being Unique	105
Being Unique Depends on Context	106
How to Use Context	107
The Advantage of Multilevel Uniqueness	105
Chapter Takeaways	107
How to Frame Your Product and Pitch	109
Pick a Feature or Quality to Frame	112
Framing Is Not Manipulating	114
The Cool Frame	116
Chapter Takeaways:	117
The Hard Part of Pitching Unique Products	119
Does Your Product Fit an Existing Category?	120
Two Types of Unique	121
Practical Problems for New Categories	122
Unique Products Pros and Cons	123
Chapter Takeaways:	125
Take the Next Step to Learn More	127



The Purpose of this Book

First, you need to know that we are in no way connected to the TV show *Shark Tank*, nor are we trying to prepare you to be on the show. This is also not about pitching your *company* to investors or venture capitalists. It's about how to pitch your *product* to retailers and consumers, the sharks you can engage on a daily basis.

We use the word “shark” to get your attention and to stress that your chances of being featured on *Shark Tank* are less than winning an Academy Award®. If you do make it to Shark Tank, the one question they always ask is, “What are your sales?” Without sales to retailers and consumers, you are dead in the water.

When it comes to buying we all have a little shark in us, and we respond to messages that are clear, compelling and targeted to satisfy our needs. If you are a salesperson, entrepreneur or an inventor, *Shark Pitch* will give you a simple and effective formula for pitching with integrity and purpose. It will help you get more sales and fewer rejections and make selling more enjoyable. You will learn how to evaluate your products and make them more marketable.

Shark Pitch

That can help you eliminate bad ideas and products with little chance of selling.

For anyone who thinks pitching is a dirty word, our pitch process is not about manipulation or clever persuasion. Authentic selling is not about faking scarcity, creating false urgency or pressuring someone into buying something they don't want but can't say no to.

You can make sharks, meaning any prospect, sit up and beg for your products if you focus on understanding their needs rather than making a sale.

You will see that pitching is not all about words. In fact, the most influential factor in any pitch is not what you claim; it's about what the prospect sees and imagines your product will do for them.

Nonverbal communication is powerful. How we stand, sit, the timbre and tempo of our voices, whether we smile when we talk or are relaxed and appear confident, all play a role in communication. But all this pales in comparison to the personality power of your product.

Our forty years' experience creating and selling simple consumer products has taught us that product personality is the most powerful communicator. Here is why.

Place your product in front of a prospect and don't say a word. She is already forming judgments, good or bad about what she sees. Products, like people, get one chance to make a good first impression. The prospect picks up your product and may caress it, squeeze it, smell it, taste it or listen to it to decide if it's right for her.

All the while, the product is silently whispering, "Love me. Buy me. Take me home." Products pitch themselves billions of times a day in every store, bazaar, farmers' market, catalog and web page around the world. They are selling even when no one is speaking for them. They silently sell themselves. Products live or die by their own devices. They are accepted or rejected on

their own, regardless of what we say in their support or defense. What this means is that good design wins. Products that solve a problem, engage our senses, satisfy a need and feel unique have a good chance of being wanted, loved, purchased, taken home and used.

What you say during a pitch matters less than what the product says about itself. That's why much of this book is about the value of creating well designed products, the number one factor in making them easy to pitch.

In the pages ahead you will see the value in making your product better through thoughtful design and by understanding human needs. You will learn how to best frame your product's most appealing qualities. You will sit with us in pitch rooms and watch how we presented our products to major retailers such as Target®, Walmart®, Auto Zone®, QVC®, Bed Bath & Beyond®, 7-11®, Disney® stores and many more.

Shark Pitch stresses that “selling is about serving” not about pushing or pressuring. We want you to discover how easy it is to sell your big idea or product when you learn how to deliver the simple, irresistible Three-Step Pitch that engages prospects in the problem you are solving for them.

Many entrepreneurs find selling the hardest part of business. Selling often leads to rejection. No one likes to be rejected, but you have to understand that when buyers say “no” they are not rejecting you. They are saying your product is not right for them. In other words they *don't need* it. The secrets to getting more sales and fewer rejections lies in your ability to identify prospects that *do need* what you have to sell, and by showing them how your product can benefit them, not you.

When you are making products and operating your company you control the process. Selling is different. You can't control the customer. But you can control the offer—how you present your product and what you say and don't say in the process. You see the difference when you use our Three-Step Pitch.

When your product solves someone's problem, engages their senses, satisfies their needs and is unique enough to make them sit up and beg for more, you will get more sales and fewer rejections. That makes selling fun.

Shark Pitch is divided into thirteen chapters. Each one reveals our insider secrets to help you put your product on every shark's most wanted list.

1. How to Create an Irresistible Three-Step Pitch
2. Be Prepared to Pitch
3. Don't Make Pitching a Dirty Word
4. Is Your Product Worth Pitching?
5. The Pain Piece of Your Pitch Formula
6. The Pleasure Piece of Your Pitch Formula
7. The Emotional Piece of Your Pitch Formula
8. Pitching to Consumers on QVC
9. How to Test Your Pitch
10. The Pitching Power of Being Unique
11. How to Frame Your Product and Pitch
12. The Hard Part of Pitching Unique Products
13. Take the Next Step to Learn More

Good Luck and good fishing.

Dennis & Mary Lou

<http://BigIdeaSchool.com>



1.

How to Create an Irresistible Three-Step Pitch

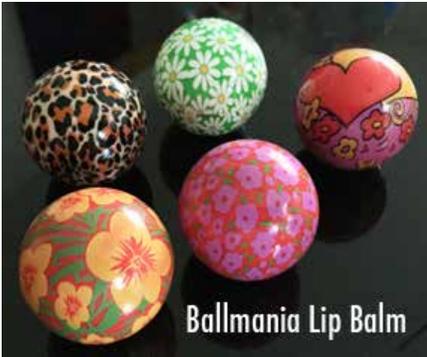
Imagine you are sitting with us in a conference room at Target Corporation in downtown Minneapolis, Minnesota waiting for the buyer to arrive. You are about to participate in a Three-Step Pitch as it happens.

Our Target sales rep has arranged the appointment. The buyer knows only that we are presenting a new lip balm. We have sold other products to Target but this is our first meeting with a buyer in this department.

The buyer enters the room. He looks to be in his mid-thirties. We shake hands and introduce ourselves. He sits down and comes right to the point. “I have ten minutes. Show me what you’ve got.”

We roll a ball of our Ballmania lip balm across the table. It’s molded in a highly polished recycled plastic and is a little smaller than a golf ball. The entire surface is printed with a colorful pattern. The buyer picks up the ball and studies it. We don’t say a word. Then he intuitively twists it, removes

the top and looks inside the base. He raises it to his nose and smells the French Vanilla scent, then dips his finger in the balm and applies it to his lips. “Creamy.” He nods. “Nice vanilla.” His eyebrows rise and he licks his lips and nods some more. It’s a good sign.



We roll more balls across the table. The designs range from animal prints and flowers to abstract designs. We’re quiet, waiting for him to ask a question.

“How do you print these patterns?”

We tell him we can’t reveal that because it is a trade secret. Then he sits forward, leans on the conference table and says, “Why a ball?”

We begin with a statement of the problem. “You know how women are always digging around in the bottom of their purses trying to find little items like their lipsticks and their lip balms?”

The buyer nods and smiles. Now we tell him why it’s in a ball.

“The ball shape makes it easier for women to feel it in the bottom of their purses.” That’s all we need to say. He can see that the designs also make a fashion statement so we don’t have to say how beautiful they are.

He frowns a little. We don’t know if he has an objection or is going to cut to the chase.

“What’s my price?”

“Your price is three dollars.”

“Too high!”

Virtually every buyer will first tell you your price is too high, no matter what it is. We expect that and don't argue. We give him more information.

“We are currently selling a dozen different designs in the beauty category in independent salons and spas. Our strategy is to create awareness and excitement before rolling it out to the broader market.”

We pause and let him think a moment as he samples the lip balm again. “What's their price?”

“Salons are paying three dollars wholesale. They're marking it up to six and seven dollars retail and higher, and it is checking out exceptionally well. We know the wholesale is too high for you, but we wanted you to see it. In twelve months we'll bring it back to you at two and a quarter so you can price it under five. This way you will get the benefit of a proven product with ready demand.”

“What if I was willing to buy now...for three dollars?”

We don't want to sell what we call our “Gallery” designs to him yet. If we do, we will lose the independent salon and spa business. He knows that, but mentioning it would be an insult, so we tell him in a different way, which won't offend.

“We aren't ready to ship in volume, plus we are still testing designs. Our goal today is to find out if you envision the ball as a Target product. Now that we have your interest, we have something to show you that we can ship now at the price you need.” We show him samples of our sport balls—golf, soccer,



tennis, basketball and baseball—all filled with the same premium formula as the Gallery balls.

“We can sell you the sport balls for two dollars, and they are available immediately. They are easy to find

Shark Pitch

in a gym bag, golf bag or in the center console of a car, so they also appeal to men and make good men's gifts.”

He thinks about it for a moment. “Okay, I like it. What about the packaging? How am I going to merchandise this?”

We show him a clamshell package with a graphic header insert. It's designed to hang on a peg or a clip strip. He takes it, opens and closes it.

“I don't want customers opening this in the store.”

We assure him it will be sealed. After a long moment he looks at our sales rep and says, “Call me tomorrow and we'll write a test.” He stands up and we all shake hands. We thank him, give him our catalog sheet, and he walks out.

“Yes!” We high five each other and celebrate.

Two days later we are in Bentonville, Arkansas pitching the Walmart lip balm buyer. She gives us 15 minutes. We already sell other products to Walmart, but not lip balm. We go through the same presentation we used with Target, and when we tell this buyer we can't sell her the Gallery ball, but we have the sport motifs, she places a six figure order.

After watching our Target pitch, you may wonder if Ballmania turned out to be a success. Within the first three months of selling hair salons and spas, sales reached six figures per month. By 2015 Ballmania lip balm (aka Twist & Pout) had sold more than \$20 million at wholesale, equivalent to about \$50 million at retail.

The Simple, Effective Three-Step Pitch

Every customer and salesperson is different; regardless, we believe it pays to keep things simple no matter how complicated your product may be. The Three-Step Pitch works because it is simple to deliver and simple to get the

prospect to engage in the decision process.

Step 1: State the problem you are solving.

Step 2: Describe the solution.

Step 3: Wait until you are asked a question.

It's that simple. Is this the only way to pitch a product? No, but it helped us sell millions of dollars worth of our products without ever once pressuring a buyer to say yes.

It is surprising how many salespeople lead their pitch with their solution before they have explained the problem. This kills a lot of pitches, because **if the prospect doesn't understand or care about the problem, they won't care about the solution.**

Over a period of five years we sold ten different products on QVC and we used the simple Three-Step Pitch to sell every one. We showed the product, stated the problem it solved and waited for questions from the QVC host and from viewers to find out what they wanted to know.

What does your pitch sound like? Have you ever said something like this, "I want to show you this great new..." or "I came to show you something revolutionary," or "I want you to see something that will change everything." Upon hearing that, many buyers think, *prove it*. Now you have created resistance instead of engagement.

To engage, you need to draw the buyer into the problem the way a writer draws us into a murder mystery. The sooner the crime (problem) is introduced, the sooner we engage to solve it. Think about any successful TV show like *Law and Order* which ran for 20 years on NBC. *Sherlock Holmes* uses the problem to draw us into his crime-solving world. Selling products is no different than selling a story. Engage the buyer with a problem and he will be on your side imagining how to solve it.

Let Your Product Introduce Itself

We invited you to join us on a sales call to show you how a product can introduce itself. We just rolled Ballmania across the table to the buyer. What if you are selling something more complex?

How about a whole genome sequencer? That sounds complex. It's definitely not lip balm. So how would we pitch it? The same way as we would pitch lip balm. Think about it.

Your prospect wants to know two things: what problem are you solving for me, and how are you solving it?

A serious problem for whole genome sequencers is the error rate. If the current error rate is one error in a million bases sequenced and your method and machine could cut that error rate in half, you would have a distinct competitive advantage, one that your prospect would love to know about.

Step 1. "Your current whole genome sequencer, model x, has an error rate of one per million bases sequenced"

Step 2. "Our New model Y cuts the error rate in half. Plus it is half the price."

Step 3. "When will it be available?"

Maybe the problem with sequencing genomes is the time it takes and yours requires 30% less time. Maybe the high cost of current machines makes it difficult for some labs to afford. You solve the problem with a special financing program that makes it affordable.

Whatever the problem, you have a way to solve it. This is your competitive advantage. Perhaps you solve the problem in a cheaper, faster, cleaner way, or use fewer resources than your competitors. Perhaps you offer same day service on supplies or monthly software updates.

Products are easier to sell when they solve a problem, engage the senses, satisfy a need and offer something unique that your prospect feels is special.

If your product doesn't have any apparent competitive advantage, you may still be able to create one by how you position or frame your product. In the upcoming chapters we will show you how to do that, too. Our goal is to help you make your product as easy to pitch as a genome sequencer or lip balm in a ball.

Think of Your Pitch as a Silent Movie

You don't need to persuade buyers. You need to serve them. Don't overwhelm them with the force of your personality or list every product feature and benefit you can think of before pulling back the curtain to reveal your product. In fact, stay away from curtains.

Holding back to build interest frustrates most buyers who are busy and prefer you get to the point. Too much preamble makes buyers impatient. It forces them to form a mental image that may not live up to what you show them. We prefer to focus the buyer's attention directly on the product before starting our pitch.

You don't need to describe the product itself. They can see that for themselves. Think of your pitch as a silent movie. Often the most complex products can be sold without a word being spoken beyond stating the problem and the solution. Once they accept your solution you can point out the features and benefits that make them feel good about buying.

Selling Is Serving

Our approach to selling is simple. Selling is serving the customers' needs, not convincing them to buy. In fact sometimes serving the retailer means refusing orders. For example, when a retailer stopped in our booth at a gift

show and showed interest in one of our products, we wanted to know a few things about their stores before we pitched a product.

Where were their store or stores located? Were they in urban or rural areas? What other products did they carry? If we thought a product they were interested in didn't fit their store, we would say so.

We had a product called *The Incredible Long Letter Stationery*. We knew it was heavily purchased by college girls. If the retailer wasn't near a college, we told them it might not sell as well in their store. They appreciated that and if they went ahead and bought it, and if it was a slow seller they didn't get upset or ask to return it. These customers continued to buy other products from us year after year. The better we got to know them, the better we were able to serve their needs.

Another example. We sold products to Walmart that were on automatic replenishment. Purchase orders were triggered by a computer algorithm based on how a product was retailing.

Walmart department buyers purchase billions of dollars worth of product each year (not all from us unfortunately). Their online reports showed us inventory levels for each of our products in every store, but the buyers didn't have time to analyze all the data. They counted on vendors, like us, to help manage our own products. Using their reporting system, we monitored our sales and inventory levels in each store so we could alert the buyer if something got out of whack.

We love more orders, yet sometimes more orders create problems, like when a replenishment algorithm was improperly set up by the IT department. Instead of triggering an order when a store has sold 70% of inventory, the algorithm might place orders when a store has sold only 30%. You can see what problems that creates. If a display contained 30 units, and you sold 10 units, the algorithm would place an order for a full display of 30 units. Now you would have 50 units in stock. If all orders were shipped, products would

pile up like cars in a massive freeway accident, making it appear that the product isn't selling.

To protect ourselves from the mistake of a thoughtless algorithm, we carefully monitored sales and inventory. We did it for our own protection as well as theirs. By serving them well, we served ourselves.

Customer goodwill is fragile, easily lost and hard to win back. Let's say you buy a product in a store or online, but never use it. You decide on the 35th day to return it. The seller tells you it's five days past the return period so the company won't allow the return and refund your money. The store may be in the right, but it also risks losing a customer forever. Who knows how many other customers they might never serve? One dissatisfied buyer may tell her friends that the seller only cares about money and not about their customer.

Everyone is someone's customer. Today you are a seller, tomorrow a buyer. It's a good idea to serve each other well.

Don't Assume You Know What Buyers Want to Know

Experienced buyers, especially those working for major retailers, have sophisticated quality detectors. They are also short of time. If they can't understand your product quickly, they know their customers won't either.

Wait for the buyer to ask a question to find out precisely what he wants to know, rather than assuming you know what he is thinking. If he doesn't ask a question, he may not understand the product or agree with the problem statement, or he might be waiting for you to speak. Then you can ask him a question. For example, "Is there something you are specifically interested in hearing more about?" The Target buyer listened to us define the problem that women have searching for small items in their purses. He accepted our premise and recognized the ball was a unique design statement. We didn't need to say more. He was ready to buy if the price was right. Always let

the buyer ask for the price. Don't offer it until he is ready to hear it. We didn't show our packaging until he asked to see it. Packaging is important, but we don't want the buyer getting bogged down on the details before he understands the problem and agrees with our solution.

Many buyers like to offer input on package design, but we don't want him distracted by merchandising details until he is committed to our solution. Once he is, merchandising becomes a secondary problem to solve depending on how he wants it displayed in the store. Don't let details get in the way of his decision to buy.

Keep your pitch under 30 seconds. If your product doesn't solve a problem the buyer cares about, doesn't engage his senses, satisfy his needs or lacks sensory appeal, you are fighting a losing battle. You won't close the sale no matter how enthusiastic you are or how detailed you make your pitch.

If the buyer is swayed by your personality rather than your solution, be prepared to deal with buyer's remorse at some point in the future.

Many products need to be demonstrated, which you may not be able to do in a conference room. That's when you show a video or a model. Our *ExtraLife*[®] produce saver involves a chemical process that can be described but can't be demonstrated live, so we state the problem of produce waste and offer our solution. We share an independent lab report to underpin our claims and show before and after photos to show effects.

Pitching a retailer is different from how you pitch a consumer. You won't be standing in front of a consumer in the aisle, so your packaging and point of purchase displays must state the problem and show the solution.

Empathy Selling Shows Respect

Buyers are among the busiest people on the planet. They are stressed and rarely have time for off-topic conversation. They appreciate it when you

show an awareness of their problems and bring them thoughtful solutions.

After they decide they want your product, they will care if you can deliver on your offer. That's when they will need to know more about you and your company.

We purchased millions of dollars of material and manufacturing services from various suppliers. Often they came to our offices to pitch a product or service. Sometimes they kicked off the meeting with a presentation showing photos of their plant and equipment. Some talked about their customer list. Very few opened their pitch with a description of a problem they wanted to solve for us.

In contrast, here is an example of a simple and effective Three-Step Pitch that got out attention.

A small New Jersey fragrance manufacturer phoned us one day and surprised us with this pitch regarding the air freshener scent in our Sneaker Balls product. Here is how his pitch played out:

Step 1. "I bought one of your Sneaker Balls and I think you should know that you are using the wrong kind of fragrance oil. Pine is too harsh and not good for counteracting protein odors that result from human sweat.

Step 2. You need a fresh and clean scent like the one we sell to a major manufacturer of fabric softener. It also includes a protein odor counter-actant."

Step 3. He got us to ask a question, "Can you send us a sample?"

He said we would have the sample in a few days and give us time to test it. Then we talked about the fragrance business. We received a sample of his fragrance, and a month later we were buying his oils. He alerted us to a problem we didn't know we had, offered a solution and got us to ask a question. It took about 30 seconds on the phone.

If the fragrance salesman had called and said he wanted to tell us about his company, we may have listened, but because we are busy and thought our fragrance problem was already solved, we may have put him off. Instead, he enlightened us, solved our problem and as a result helped our product gain wider acceptance. That is an example of serving as opposed to selling.

No matter where, how, or what you are pitching, your goal must be to help your customer solve a problem as quickly and simply as you can.

Chapter Takeaways

- Make your Three-Step Pitch to the point and relevant. Keep it under 30 seconds. You must solve a problem the buyer cares about, engage his senses, satisfy his needs and be unique or you are fighting a losing battle trying to make a sale.
- Remember, everyone is someone's customer. Today you are a seller, tomorrow a buyer, so it's a good idea to serve each other well.
- Let your product introduce itself. Know when to talk (10%) and when to listen (90%.) With physical products, show the product first to get immediate engagement and pique the buyer's curiosity about what he actually sees—not what he imagines.
- Show empathy. Buyers are among the busiest people on the planet. They appreciate it when you show a grasp of *their* problems by bringing them thoughtful solutions that don't waste their time.

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2.

Be Prepared to Pitch

Imagine you're at a party and someone asks what you do for a living. Are you prepared to engage them in conversation about your work? You've probably heard of the elevator pitch where you meet a buyer or investor in an elevator and have 30 seconds to pitch your product or business idea. Engaging someone at a party is not the same as pitching a retailer, but it is a great place to practice. The Three-Step Pitch is also a formula for making yourself sound interesting and worth talking to. Telling someone you are an entrepreneur or an inventor is not nearly as engaging as when you add a description of a problem you are working on and your solution. If the problem interests the listener, their natural response is to want to know more.

Pitch to Engage Rather Than Persuade

Communicate your passion and vision in as few words as possible and

people will care more about the problem you are solving. Your pitch needs to be clear and compelling and delivered without hesitation. Spend time working on it and practicing your delivery any chance you get whether in front of a mirror or at a party.

Your goal is not to persuade, it is to engage and inform, even entertain. You want to bring the listener into your world and hold their attention. If the listener empathizes or cares about the problem, they will want to know more. If they feel you are trying to sell them something, they may turn off.

We are so bombarded with sales messages today that people often put up a mental wall at the first sign of what feels like a reach for their money. If they are interested in the problem you introduce, they will engage and you can follow their lead. If they aren't interested, ask them a question to find out what they do care about. There may be a way you can help them solve a different problem.

Don't think your product is too complicated to boil down to a few sentences. Avoid overwhelming your prospect with features and data. Don't talk about the size of the market unless they ask. At first contact, the purpose of your pitch is to elicit a response such as: "Tell me more," or "How does it work?" or "How did you get this idea?"

Instead of presenting the problem as a statement, frame it as a personal question to engage the buyer's imagination and bring them into your world.

Begin by saying something like: "You know how..." or "Have you ever noticed how..." then go on to describe the problem and your solution. Even if the customer has not personally experienced this problem, you want to draw them into the scene you create.

The problem statement for our Sneaker Balls sport shoe freshener is:

"You know how obnoxious it is when teenagers take off their smelly shoes?"

The solution statement is:

“We make a product called Sneaker Balls. It’s the only sports air freshener that makes stinky sneakers smell fresh and clean.”

Virtually everyone with teenagers has experienced this problem. If the listener is interested in the problem he will want to know more about the solution, so be prepared to answer his question rather than launching into what you think he should know.

Study Your Target Before You Pitch

Frame your problem statement to fit the listener. The problem statement below, “You know how women...” is appropriate when talking to a male buyer. It’s different when talking to a female buyer. Here is how the pitches are different.

The problem statement for Ballmania lip balm when talking to a man:

“You know how women are always having to dig around in the bottom of their purses to search for little items like their lipstick and lip balm?”

If you are talking to a woman buyer, make it fit her interests:

“Have you ever had a problem finding small items in your purse, or watched friends digging around to find their lipstick or lip balm?”

The solution statement for Ballmania is:

“Our ball-shaped lip balm called Ballmania makes it easier for women to feel it in the bottom of their purses.”



When you pitch a product such as our ExtraLife® produce saver to the retail produce buyer or supermarket manager, you can't imply that their produce isn't fresh. You need to state the problem from their interest and point of view.

The problem statement when pitching ExtraLife to a retailer would be:

“Have you ever had a customer say your produce spoils before they can eat it, and they suggest your produce wasn't truly fresh when they bought it?”

The solution statement when pitching the retailer is:

“Our green ExtraLife disk keeps produce fresh up to twice as long in the home refrigerator so the question of freshness won't come up. Plus, if your customers waste less they will buy more because they're confident it will last long enough to eat.”

The problem statement when pitching consumers and media is:

“You know how fresh produce seems to spoil before you can eat it all and then ends up looking like a science experiment in the bottom of your fridge?”

The solution statement is:

“Our ExtraLife produce saver is a little green disk that keeps fruits and veggies fresh up to twice as long in the refrigerator.”

You don't have to explain how it works unless the prospect wants to know.

Some people don't care HOW something works, but they want proof, such as tests or testimonials from recognizable sources, that it does.

First, you want them to understand the problem and care about the solution. If they do care, the next question may be, "How does it work?" or "Where can I buy it?" If they don't ask a question, they may not know what to ask. In that case tell them the size of the problem and what inspired you to solve it. That may prompt questions to show what interests them.

Now it's your turn to create a pitch for your product.

My Problem Statement is:

My Solution Statement is: (include the product name)

Try out your pitch on friends and family to see how they respond. If you get a lot of "mehs," go back to the drawing board and rethink how to frame it. If you don't get three times as many "wows" as "mehs," you either have a poor pitch, or you aren't solving a problem enough people care about. Either way, *you* have a problem and should consider dropping your product or redesigning it.

Before you do that be sure you are pitching potential buyers or users of your product. For example, if you are pitching a product for dog owners and none of your test subjects own dogs, your aren't going to get useful information.

Likewise if you expect to sell a dog-related product to a home and garden store, make sure they have a pet products department and a designated buyer you can talk to. Always match the problem and solution with the appropriate prospect.

Be Prepared to Respond to Objections and Challenges

Buyers may want to see proof of your product or sales claims, especially if your product is unique and they haven't seen or heard of it or they aren't aware of the problem you are solving.

Some product claims may seem obvious to you so you assume proof isn't needed. You might think a claim that women have trouble finding things in their purses is apparent. However, that doesn't mean it's obvious to your prospects, or that they won't challenge your claim.

Buyers are human. They have good and bad days and are pitched so often they can get bored and have low expectations from seeing too many "me too" products. A buyer might challenge a claim that seems obvious to you, just to have fun with you, or even to establish his dominance or infer he will be demanding if you get down to negotiations. Most seasoned buyers will wear their poker faces until they are finished negotiating.

A buyer may interrupt your pitch to ask a question that has nothing to do with a claim. If you are prepared, it won't throw your pitch off balance. This is another reason we show the product before we start a pitch. It helps us discover what interests the buyer.

When you are prepared, the buyer's question is a chance for you to increase engagement and prove yourself and your product. If a buyer wants to challenge a claim, offer objective information to support your assertions.

If you say women experience difficulty finding things in their purses, be prepared to educate a buyer who says he has never noticed that problem. Be

prepared with data, even if it is through an informal survey. Ask ten women you know if they have this problem and use the results to enlighten and inform. Talk about how the size of a purse matters.

You can say, “We did a very simple survey with ten women to test our observation and found that eight out of ten (or whatever the actual number) agreed they have a problem finding small items like lipstick and lip balm in the bottom of their purses, and they told us it is frustrating for them, especially if they are driving and need their lip balm.

For a product like ExtraLife® produce saver we showed our independent lab report and test results done by other objective sources such as the *New York Times* Test Kitchen, and from consumer product advocate Dr. Dean Edell. At the time we introduced ExtraLife, he was a nationally syndicated television medical news reporter and host of NBC’s Dr. Dean Edell.

Before we pitched any of our products on QVC, they had to be tested and approved by their legal department. ExtraLife went through a rigorous time study over a few weeks testing lettuce and other produce. QVC wanted their own proof before allowing us to make any claims that our product made fruits and vegetables stay fresh longer in the refrigerator crisper bin.

We sold a product called Cedar Magic to QVC. We put concentrated cedar leaf oil in our Sneaker Balls to keep moths away from places where people store their wool clothing and furs and where clothes moths love to lay their eggs. When the eggs hatch, the larvae eat the fibers for nourishment. In other words, it’s not the parent moth that create holes in our sweaters, it’s their starving kids.

QVC made us substantiate our claim that cedar fragrance actually makes a difference to moths. Through research we discovered that the smell of cedar—or any strong fragrance for that matter—prevents moths from detecting the smell of wool fibers so they can’t find their target.

Initially, we wanted to use the analogy that the smell of cedar fragrance is as repugnant to moths as rotten eggs are to us. QVC legal would not let us say that on-air. We could only say that strong fragrances make it harder for the clothes moth to locate the smell of wool and lay their eggs. When we discovered that any strong scent would work, including lavender, we added lavender-scented balls for drawers and closets and they sold well, too.

What made Cedar Magic unique? Because the cedar scent was contained in our ball, we could use concentrated oils compressed from cedar leaves instead of the actual wood. Pound for pound it was seven times stronger than blocks of cedar. That made Cedar Magic more effective, last longer and certain not to stain a garment because the oils never came in touch with clothing. As a result, the balls could be laid in drawers as well as hung in closets or packed in storage containers.

Here is our pitch to QVC customers:

Our problem statement for Cedar Magic was:

“You know how awful it feels to reach in your closet for your fine wool sweater only to discover moths have eaten holes in it?”

Our solution statement for Cedar Magic was:

“Natural cedar scent keeps moths away from wool garments. The scent in one Cedar Magic ball is equal to the amount of cedar oil in more than a half dozen cedar wood blocks, and because Cedar Magic oil is suspended inside the ball, it will never stain your clothes.”

Make a Buyer Want to Take Your Calls

Be in this for the long run. If a retailer isn't ready to place an order, be gracious and back off. Pushy salespeople come across as inconsiderate and even desperate. You don't like people who won't hear “no” and neither do

buyers. We've all heard the sales maxim, "Don't take no for an answer." That may be okay when you are trying to get an appointment. Persistence can pay off because your product and pitch haven't been rejected. Badgering a buyer after they have said no, however, will put you on their "no buy" list. When you come across as desperate, they may assume you are having trouble selling other buyers, which means they shouldn't buy either.

You want to create a "bandwagon effect," enticing them to join other happy retailers. You don't want to create a "funereal effect," making them wonder if the product is dead.

A buyer's reasons for declining may have nothing to do with your product and more to do with her "open to buy," meaning she doesn't have available funds to place an order. Some buyers will tell you they have no open to buy, while others don't want you to think they aren't prosperous, so they say it's not for them.

It all depends on your product and their situation. State your problem and solution so they know what's in it for them, and when money becomes available they might call you and ask you to come back in and show the product again.

We once pitched Spencer Gifts our line of funny greeting cards called Sugar Free Cards. They were little 12-page booklets with strong punch lines. The buyer turned us down because they only carried cards in a handful of stores and didn't have any room for our booklets. Every time we saw the buyer at a trade show, she would stop and read the cards and laugh, but she never bought—and we never pushed her to buy.

Then, one day she called us out of the blue and asked if we could fly to New York and meet with her to discuss our cards. After two years of her enjoying our cards but never buying, she placed a six-figure order. Why? Management decided to add greeting cards to all of their stores, and she had the green light to buy ours, something she had wanted to do for two years.

No matter what happens with your pitch, thank your buyer for her time and follow up with a handwritten note. Now they are more appreciated than ever because they're rarely sent.

Even though your current product doesn't seem to interest her at the time, if you are thoughtful, organized and don't waste her time, she will be more likely to want to see your next new product. She may also send you to a different department buyer in the company that is a better fit.

Chain store buyers move from one department to another and sometimes go to work for competitors. If you make a good impression, you may be able to follow them to their next internal position or approach them at their new company.

In 2002, we created a unique line of plush animal car air fresheners trademarked Zooville®. They were about the size of a tennis ball, and they hung from a suction cup that stuck to the car window. A Kmart buyer ordered large displays for all stores for one Christmas. We delivered and they sold well.

The following spring that buyer left Kmart and went to work for Advance Auto. A few months into his new job he called us to get our products into Advance Auto's 3,000 plus stores.

Chapter Takeaways

- Always begin your pitch with a statement of the problem you are solving. You may be aware of the problem, but your listeners may not be until you identify it for them. Don't think about this process as "selling." Think about it as "serving."
- Frame the problem from the prospect's point of view. What do they need to know? Most of us like to learn about something new, especially if it solves a problem we can't solve on our own.

- The purpose of your pitch is to create curiosity and engagement. When you finish your problem and solution statements, you want the buyer to say, “Tell me more!” or “How did you get this idea?” or “How does it work?” These are invitations to engage with the prospect and provide details that may interest them.
- The bandwagon effect is a strong human motivation. If your product is selling well, emphasize who is buying. You are doing them a disservice if you have a product consumers want, and you aren’t letting buyers know. Once a retailer learns that others are making money with your item, he will want to reap the benefits, too.
- Once you have given your pitch and answered the buyer’s questions, remember to ask for the sale. By using a call to action, you can gauge the true depth of interest and either discuss terms or know that the meeting is over and politely leave. Always be polite to buyers. Thank them for giving you their time and ask if you can call on them again to show them new products. If they say yes, they have committed to hearing your next pitch. If they hedge or say no, you can avoid wasting their time and yours.

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