

What's Wrong with Webinars

By **Marie Warner**

As seen in... **SalesVantage.com**

Many sales organizations - perhaps yours is one of them - initiate their first sales contact to a prospect with an invitation to attend a webinar or web-based demo. This popular yet misguided sales activity is most likely a waste of sales effort, company resources and, worst yet, may ultimately result in a *potential opportunity lost forever*. Why? Here are three reasons:

1. You have no understanding of the goals, problems or needs of your prospect, since no meaningful discussion took place before your webinar. With no understanding of those specific goals, nor the obstacles to meeting those goals, your webinar may not even address these "top-of-mind" issues. And with that ground not covered, it is challenging to gain agreement from the prospect as to how your offering can help them. The prospect has no "vision" of your offering in place at their firm. And with no agreement as to how your offering can help, you have no understanding of the value your prospect sees (or doesn't see) in your company's offerings.

2. During the course of a webinar extolling the many wonderful features of your offering, the prospect may view a capability he/she perceives is "not needed" or raises objections. During a webinar, how can you address this concern? Your prospect may conclude, "This is not for us.", and then will immediately disengage. And it is very difficult to re-establish a sales dialog with a prospect who has already concluded you can't help them.

Another bad outcome, the prospect may see some capabilities needed, as well as other features of no interest at all. When the time comes to negotiate, the prospect will want a **discount for all those "unnecessary" features.**

3. With no understanding of the goals of each attendee, who may work for different companies, have diverse job roles and titles, with varied goals, your presentation will highlight the "Features-Benefits" of your offering. "Here's a feature - here's what it will do for you." At this point, that is *your opinion only*, and there is no quicker way to turn off a prospect than to tell them, "This is what you need."

So how can your sales and marketing team more effectively utilize webinars to advance the sale of your offerings? Here's three ideas:

1. Change when in the selling cycle you introduce the webinar to the prospect. A webinar highlighting capabilities is an appropriate *proof step*. Proof should be established after the prospect has acknowledged a goal or problem, and after that prospect stated their belief that a specific capability can help them. What the prospect needs next to advance the sales is evidence that your offering can actually deliver that capability. An effective webinar can be structured around demonstrating that capability, and gaining agreement from the prospect, "Yes, you proved it to me. I now believe that your offering gives me that capability to solve my problem or reach my goal."

2. Get the goals out. If the expectation is that the webinar comes early in the selling cycle, find a way to get the prospect's goals and problems known before conducting the session. For example, a *simple email "survey"* with a menu of the most common goals and issues can help direct what is covered in the webinar. This is effective when the webinar targets a functional role - CFOs, for example - so that emphasis is on the common goals and obstacles of that job responsibility. Your audience of CFOs from different companies is more likely to remain engaged if the webinar is tailored to their "common" issues. Alternatively, the webinar can target the interdependent goals and issues of a single company.

3. Educate and Train. Webinars can also be an efficient and effective educational tool. Using this technology for orientation and training of new clients or departments can be highly productive use of time –

yours and your clients. But most companies prefer to educate a committed client, not early "tire-kickers". Be honest with yourself. Do your webinars target the lower level knowledge-seekers or higher level decision makers in your prospects?

If your webinars have been successful lead generators - Congratulations! You may want to try these tips for even more winning webinars - and to avoid the professional equivalent of attending a party, and talking only about yourself.

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About the Author

Marie Warner is founder and President of Warner Professional Sales, LLC. Warner Professional Sales helps companies achieve **sales force success through people, performance and planning**. Warner Professional Sales helps companies get more revenue growth from their sales force by *recruiting* the right sales staff, 2) *training and developing* those sales professionals to consistently exceed revenue goals, and helping management to define and implement the best sales "process" and tactics for sales cycle control, territory assignments and quota planning.

Marie brings to client engagements over two-decades of leadership in the sale of technology, consulting and financial products and services to the Fortune 1000 and major financial institutions. This includes nine years of experience as Chief Sales Officer, in both enterprise-level and start-up organizations.

Marie Warner has authored articles in ***Mass High Tech, SalesResources.com, SalesVantage.com, EyesOnSales.com, Software Sales Journal, SalesDoctors***, and ***Women's Business*** addressing successful sales strategies and tactics. She is a member of NETSEA (New England Technology Sales Executives Association), WITI (Women in Technology, International), Human Capital Institute, The Commonwealth Group, NAPS (National Association of Personnel Services) and participates in numerous other entrepreneurial, technology and marketing organizations.

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