



## Freight Forwarders: Match Your Sales Process to the Situation

One size does not fit all. This is as true for selling shoes as it for freight forwarders looking for new customers to grow their business. Every prospect you are selling to as a freight forwarder is unique in their own way. Their individual personality and the requirements of their organization are just two of the factors that impact their buying and decision making process. There are many other obvious, and not so obvious, things that add to the complexity.

It's for these reasons that using the same sales approach with all your prospects is a mistake. The first goal with any prospect needs to be understanding their motivation for taking action and making the decision to buy. It's knowing their motivation that enables you to customize your approach to their situation.

This is not to say freight forwarders should not have a consistent sales process. It is just that part of any scalable and repeatable process has to be understanding what makes each prospect unique and using it to your sales advantage.

The key to understanding a buyer's motivation is to know the factors that influence the 'why' and 'how' of their decision making process – because both matter. This is how you shorten sales cycles, sharpen your sales message, and close more deals.

Here are 3 questions to ask when sizing up a new prospect – each is vital to the selling process and should be the first things you figure out with each new opportunity.

## Are you talking to the right person?

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It's no surprise that a person's role in the organization is important to how you approach a new prospect.

For the most part, as a person's title gets bigger so does the person's influence in the buying decision. But there are exceptions to that rule. It's not uncommon for senior leaders to defer buying authority to their team. In this situation, there may be a single decision maker or multiple people in the department involved. The important step, of course, is figuring out who holds the most influence over the decision making process and act accordingly.

This point seems obvious – but every sales person has wasted a lot of time and lost opportunities due to not getting the buy-in of the real decision maker(s). This is very simple in theory, and very difficult in practice.

It's common that the loudest voice in the room doesn't have the most authority. Or, when it comes to RFQs, your contacts may simply be there to gather data and will have no influence on the decision. One thing is for certain, if you are not sure you have the right decision makers as part of your discussions, then you **do not** have the right decision makers as part of your discussions.

## How does the organization operate?

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Sometimes buying decisions are less about an individual and more about figuring out the way an organization works. Some companies give people and departments a great deal of autonomy and authority to make purchasing decisions. Others require team consensus and review for everything. Knowing this from the outset is important.

Often, the larger the organization the more likely there will be many influencers. Whether or not this is the case - and who those people are must be determined.

The pitfalls of failing to understand this about the organization is the same as not selling to the right people. The result will be the same as well – wasted time and no sale.

Another dynamic is when decisions are made at a central headquarters in another city by a corporate purchasing team. This is a situation every freight forwarder can relate to and underscores the importance of knowing the organization and getting to the right decision makers.

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## What is the prospect's buying style?

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Just like organizations, every person you will sell to is different. Some buyers like to feel as though they are controlling the sales process – in fact, this is NOT an uncommon characteristic of people with logistics in their title (but you probably know that already).

Some buyers want to be educated and led to the solution. Others have a hard time saying no – and will string you along simply out of a fear of having to do so. Getting a yes is hard, but sometimes getting a no can be just as difficult.

Sizing up the personality and style of your prospect can guide how you present your solutions and ultimately make a sale. Most importantly, managing the person in the sale is the first step to moving the conversation beyond just rates and cost.

Once you have the organization and people figured out, it's time to position your company. Here are 3 questions to ask that make this easy.

## Why are they looking to buy?

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It is important to figure out why a prospect agreed to speak with you in the first place. Every sales person is excited to get a meeting with a hot, new prospect – and if they are talking to you there is a reason. But, never make assumptions about why.

Are they unhappy with their current freight rates?

Have they experienced service issues?

Or, are they just testing the market for rates but have no intention of making a change?

There can be many reasons. Asking 'why' is a fair and reasonable question to ask at the outset of any conversation. There is really no wrong answer to the question, but what you learn with the question will shape your approach. Therefore, the sooner you know the answer the better.

“ During the sales process, prospective clients will look beyond price if you give them a reason to. Setting your company up as different and somehow better than the competition is how you do this. ”

## Have you differentiated yourself?

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Have you figured out how to differentiate yourself from other forwarders? This can be a challenge for forwarders and other logistics services providers since freight rates are often viewed as a commodity. It is difficult to break the mindset that a truck is a truck and a container is a container. When this happens you are forced to compete purely on price. That is a race to the bottom and not sustainable.

During the sales process, prospective clients will look beyond price if you give them a reason to. Setting your company up as different and somehow better than the competition is how you do this. Making suggestions during your discussions with clients with the genuine goal of helping and not selling is one way to accomplish this. When a salesperson can offer advice it helps to establish their position as a subject matter expert, and more importantly an asset that will help the customer. That perceived additional value is what enables freight forwarders to NOT compete on price alone.

A good sign you have accomplished this objective is when prospects start asking for your opinion. As a freight forwarder, offering technology can be another key differentiator and a good way to reach this level of status with prospects.

## What criteria are you being evaluated on?

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Have you asked about the criteria in place to evaluate you? (If the answer is only price, see 'Have you differentiated yourself?' above.) Beyond making assumptions about the prospect based on company size or an individual's personality, there is likely a specific set of criteria you (and competitors) are being compared against. Many times prospects have a checklist of weighted items they'll use.

What technology do you offer?

Where are your offices located?

How do your transit times compare?

The decision criteria prospects use beyond rates alone are important to understand. Make sure you know these criteria as quickly as possible. If you do not know, ask.

You compete every day with a lot of other freight forwarders and logistics services providers. Matching your sales process to your potential buyer can give you an immediate advantage. With some simple preparation and these basic questions, you can adapt your sales process in a way that differentiates you from your competition. Not asking questions and using a one size fits all approach means you are missing out on the details that make the difference between closing new business and just wasting your time.





## How can we help you?

For further information and to discuss how our teams can assist you, please email [growth@gocatapult.com](mailto:growth@gocatapult.com)

Visit [www.gocatapult.com](http://www.gocatapult.com)