



## The SMMarT Guy

# Don't Insult Your Prospects

By Kim Robinson

I moved my family to Iowa from the San Francisco Bay Area six years ago. My phone was old (at least for a cell phone) and my service contract had expired, so I planned to explore changing providers as well. One day, I set out with my six-year-old daughter to visit various phone stores.

In one store, a salesman came up to us and began his sales process by asking the identity of my current service provider.

The name of the company was barely out of my mouth when he dropped his chin, shot out his arm with his index finger pointing directly at my heart, and bellowed, "BIG MISTAKE!"

My daughter and I both jumped at his unexpected, and unwelcome, declaration. Then, with his indictment still hanging in the air, he combined a negative tirade about my current provider with a few positive comments about the quality of his competing phone service.

His behavior was outrageous but, apart from the arm and voice theatrics, he used a common tactic in sales—tearing down the product currently owned to make the product for sale look better in comparison. The problem with this tactic is that all I heard was him telling me I made a stupid decision when I bought the other phone, so I was, therefore, stupid and quite possibly an idiot. *Gee, thanks. I needed that.*

Poor salespeople use this tactic of negative comparison all the time. Once, when we lived in southern California, a heating and cooling "expert" came into our home to give my wife and me a free furnace inspection; during the winter it does occasionally get cold in Los Angeles. Really, it does. As soon as the expert saw our furnace, he began to list

numerous complaints about its quality. It quickly became clear to us that all he intended to inspect was our willingness to purchase a new, and very expensive, unit. His demeaning comments led me to wonder aloud (as I ushered him out the door) how we ever managed to stay warm inside our home.

Another time a door-to-door vacuum cleaner salesman came into our home here in Iowa and told my wife and me that our vacuum cleaner was garbage and that it only picked up a fraction of the dirt in our carpet. He added, however, that his super-duper vacuum worked so well, our carpets would (finally) be clean. As I showed him to the door, I told him that we did not want his vacuum because we wanted the dirt on our carpet to get deep enough to grow corn.

All three of these salesmen ignored the fact that, by insulting something I had purchased earlier, they were insulting me. Their negative comments about the quality of the products I owned implied I did something stupid when I purchased them. I certainly didn't want to compound my errors by purchasing what they were trying to sell.

I tell one, or all, of these stories to the salespeople I train to illustrate the point they should never—*never*—insult a purchase their prospect had made earlier. Instead, if the quality of a product already owned ever comes up (even if the prospect volunteers negative comments and admits they made a mistake), the salesman should either find something about the product to compliment, or say nothing. Good salespeople sell on the value of their products, not on the lack of value of their competitors.

The next time a salesman tells you the product or service you purchased earlier is no good, you may want to mimic the cell phone salesman I encountered six years ago. As soon as you hear the implied insult, straighten your arm, point your finger at his or her heart and declare, "BIG MISTAKE!" ■

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