

# Authenticity as an essential and powerful sales tool

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There is no doubt that building trust, establishing credibility and strengthening relationships with customers is vital for anyone selling a product or service. This is especially relevant when it comes to digital transformation and selling solutions to help companies meet their business objectives.



Murunwa Mashamba, senior specialist: key accounts manager at Atron Karabina. Image supplied

While the private sector may be more up to speed when it comes to upgrading their tech business solutions, the public sector needs to rely on authentic sales teams who have their best interests at heart and who understand their needs and the fundamentals at play, with budgets often being a major factor.

Too often, specifically in this sector, we hear about tenders being awarded and paid, but projects not being delivered. Here the role and responsibility of the salesperson cannot be underestimated.

## Navigating the customer journey

Within the tech business solutions space, the options and services available are plentiful. A formidable salesperson will navigate this journey with a customer, and suggest what the customer needs, not necessarily what the customer wants, in order to get the most value from the solutions that they sell.

When advising clients in any sector, a key recommendation may be to move away from physical infrastructure and invest in cloud. Many examples in South Africa can attest to the fact that not upgrading infrastructure can lead to an entire system collapse. This lesson has, unfortunately, been learnt many times before, including failure of systems and security breaches due to not migrating or keeping platforms and functionality up to date.

Partnering with a skilled digital advisor means that they can assess your business needs now, and in the future, and suggest how the business can migrate to a more effective platform that won't lead to the original equipment manufacturer no longer being able to support them.

### **Being mindful of budgets and timing**

All sectors in South Africa are heavily budget-driven. When partnering with a company or public entity, being mindful of both their budgetary constraints as well as their financial year timing and budgetary allocations is vital.

Sales consultants need to have real conversations, align with the customer's strategy and technology roadmap, and engage with them well before they start drafting the budget for the following year.

As an example, the financial year end within the higher education space is December, so this conversation needs to start as early as March or April.

Budget cuts are another consideration, especially in the years since the pandemic. From a service provider perspective, we need to make sure that the services and solutions recommended are fit to the environment and that they will experience value out of it, as well as save on budget in the long run.

This can include a phased approach and alignment to their long-term strategy, an approach that is relevant across private, public and commercial sectors.

Within the often overwhelming tech solutions space, a digital transformation partner can also guide customers about the enormous discounts and benefits available from certain providers, especially when committing to a large-scale, phased project.

This also enables progress to start, for the board of the organisation to realise the value in the solutions being implemented, and to motivate the budget for the additional phases needed.

### **Driving solutions and value**

While digital modernisation might sound like a buzzword, a sales consultant needs to help customers understand what their exact needs are and how to get there.

This includes thoroughly assessing the environment and what level of migration they need and are ready for. This also includes being transparent about all the costs involved, be they the initial implementation as well as any monthly costs for storage and data utilisation.

At the end of the day, the most important thing is value. Whichever customer and sector you are partnering with, they want to know what their return on investment is or what value you are bringing as a service provider.

Customers also might not appreciate or understand the solution being sold to them, which makes developing an honest relationship with customers so vital.

Adopting a long-term supportive partnership is really key. When providing a business solution or migrating platforms, this

relationship isn't over as soon as implementation is done.

Nothing ruins a customer relationship more than feeling abandoned and thrown into the deep end. As a service provider, you need to walk this transformation journey with your customers, explain what is needed, and help them and the organisation as a whole feel secure with what is being implemented.

Guide them every step of the way until they are comfortable enough to handle the next steps within their own team.

Business solutions within the public sector have the ability to transform South Africa as a country. Driving the right solutions with customers should be non-negotiable to avoid wasteful expenditure. You need to be a trusted advisor for your customers and always be authentic in your assessment of their needs.

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