

five trust building blocks



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In 1999, Swan, Bowers and Richardson conducted a comprehensive study of the drivers of trust in the sales process. Trust drives the development of long-term relationships in personal sales processes and is the key to moving from a short-term, transaction-base toward a long-term, relationship-based interaction between buyer and seller. Trust reflects reliance on mutual willingness and confidence. Trust is the result of past relations and provides the input for future relationships. The interpretation of trust varies, however, and requires that salespeople assess the meaning of trust specific to each buyer.

Swan, Bowers and Richardson found that empirical research on customer trust in the salesperson consisted of 49 antecedents and 47 consequences that could be grouped into six salesperson-related dimensions and one company-related dimension.

Georges and Guenzi developed this model further for the consumer oriented sales process in the financial services market and reduced the six dimensions to five:

1. Customer orientation

The salesperson leads a customer's orientation to higher levels of satisfaction. The 24 item customer orientation scale (SOCO) developed by Saxe and Weitz in 1982 can be used to measure and evaluate the interaction process with customers.

2. Selling orientation

A salesperson's hard selling approaches and behaviours aimed at maximizing immediate sales volume produce a negative effect on customer trust.

3. Expertise

Expertise is defined as the salesperson's knowledge, technical competence and ability to provide answers to specific questions. Perceived expertise is a predictor of customer trust in this salesperson.

4. Likeability

The extent to which a salesperson is perceived as friendly, courteous and pleasant. Mutual liking between the buyer and the seller is a key driver of customer trust, but is not sufficient to establish a good working relationship.

5. Dependability

Georges and Guenzi excluded from their research the company-related dimensions identified by Swan, Bowers and Richardson. Ingram et al stressed the importance of dependability as a trust building block. Important measures of building trust in a supplier firm are its reputation and customer satisfaction from previous interactions. These factors build a dependable behaviour that pre-determines the sales person's manoeuvring space.

Georges and Guenzi's empirical study in the Italian retail banking industry showed that the salesperson's customer orientation and likeability positively influence customer trust in the business of consumer bank transactions. A selling orientation in a bank has a negative impact on customer trust. However, the researchers found that the salesperson's expertise does not influence customer trust and theorized that consumers assume that expertise in a bank salesperson is a prerequisite and important for other types of financial transactions.

In general, an increasing level of trust in the salesperson by the buyer enables a more diverse set of buyer behaviours:

1. faster recommendation of the service and a firm to other potential customers;
2. faster repurchase or cross-buy of a service from the same supplier;
3. faster switch from a competitor.

Although the strength of these individual trust building blocks varies depending on industry type, it is the sales person's responsibility to determine the trust building blocks that are critical to building a relationship with a specific buyer. This task depends on personal mastery.

assets:



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pros:

- Model stresses that the sales process depends on previous encounters and that the current sales process drives the success of future sales processes.

cons:

- Model tested in financial industry (consumer services): likely to be different for other industries.

references:

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