



# The Ideal Versus the Dream

## Three traits to look for in each customer relationship

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I believe in goals, targets and lists. They simplify things and make it easy to see where you are going and where you want to be. I also believe it is possible to obtain almost any customer if you have enough time and do not care about profit.

I will explain. I have always believed the quickest way to success is to define success. For me, successful office technology sales require me to first identify all of the ideal customers in my territory and then work through them. I get to know the decision-makers, the current status of equipment, etc.

My list of ideal customers includes all those I think match well to those I have either worked with successfully in the past, or the type of account one of my colleagues has worked with successfully.

The list also includes some dream accounts — the type of accounts that are the same, but on a larger scale. This approach is very successful. Larger accounts take time; you have to get to know them. You need to understand what is important to them and what works best for them. Their workflows are important. Having them on your list is essential because they will take time.

But you may also need to remove some of these accounts, because sometimes a “dream customer” is a nightmare dressed like a dream. Here are some things that can happen if you focus on the dream rather than what is ideal:

- You can focus too much on dream customers. Often, they are not so much ideal as they are high profile.
- You can miss some important steps when you approach business as a “who’s who” instead of who is right.
- You can overlook some clear signs you are not a good match. You can jump too quickly to say “yes” to every demand and lose some important elements.
- You can compare your business and clients to someone else’s and feel inferior. You may want to have A-list customers so badly that you forget how they earn top spots as ideal customers.

Look for the following traits when you are making your list of ideal customers:

- **Ideal customers should be those you can successfully wow.** This means you offer products and services that solve their problems and give them solutions.
- **Ideal customers should get a fair deal from you and you should be at least a little profitable from day one.** It is not a good deal for your customers if you cannot continue to give them great products and services after the sale. You need



to be profitable to continue to support them.

■ **Communication between you and your customers should be easy.** It should be a two-way street. If there is an issue, you need to resolve it quickly through good communication.

Many times, in approaching high-profile customers, you will see a red flag that one of these three things is not present. For example, you finally get a response — a much-anticipated email from someone in a company on your dream list.

The response is only one-sided, asking you to provide a price. You try to ask about wants and needs to check your fit. The customer gives you little in response. He (or she) just needs a price.

This, to me, is a clear sign an impostor has made it to your list of dream customers. It is about more than price. Everything is about something beyond price.

In the above example, you cannot identify how to wow the customer. You cannot predict a fair deal or profitability until you get some detail. Communication is not two-way and does not come easily. This example shows the telltale signs of a dream customer that should not be on your ideal customer list.

You will have more time to serve your ideal customer when you realize who you can serve best. This often means evaluating potential customers by something other than revenue potential, because ideal customers bring in profitable revenue, not always high revenue.

I believe you will find, as I have, that it is easier to serve many ideal customers versus a less-than-ideal dream customer. In fact, with time, your ideal customers will likely grow. You will grow with them, and your ideal customers will far surpass what you might have once dreamed of building. ■

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