



# The Buyer's Journey

## Advice for the sales rep when joining in the middle

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When buyers call “just wanting a price,” they have completed a significant portion of the “buyer’s journey” — at least in their minds. In 2019, Forbes magazine published a study saying that the average B2B buyer has completed 57% of his (or her) buyer’s journey before ever contacting a sales rep.

In researching this article, I found a number of posts that argued with the 57% number, but I never found one that could effectively argue with the concept that buyers are performing much more of their own due diligence and research before involving a salesperson. As I have been saying for years, it is a different world. Today’s buyers are more educated and informed than they used to be, which creates some significant challenges for us:

**(1) Your buyer doesn’t trust you.** A 2017 HubSpot study concluded that only 3% of buyers consider salespeople to be trustworthy. That is a kick in the pants, isn’t it? At least we beat out lawyers and politicians, but that is not exactly good. When a buyer calls saying that he knows what he needs and just needs a price, that is an expression that he does not trust salespeople to accurately define his needs and assist in a solution.

**(2) Your buyer has done a lot of research and not all of it may be correct.** Research on nearly any topic is both plentiful and readily accessible today, but that is a double-edged sword. Most articles, guidelines, white papers and other forms of internet research are nonspecific and one-size-fits-all. The buyer’s journey may be different between industries — or even companies and product lines within the same industry. That means your buyer can access a lot of information that might actually run counter to what he really needs, because it is not specific to your buyer’s situation.

**(3) Buyers do not know what they do not know.** Even when defining their own needs, buyers might be asking the wrong questions of themselves, their counterparts and co-workers. We add value when we can be a part of the investigation phase of the buyer’s journey — if the buyer will allow us in.

**(4) Competitors may have guided their research.** We have all seen this one. We get an RFP with specifications that are obvious attempts to limit offerings to one company’s products or services, and we know that a competitor helped set the standard. Today, it does not have to be a bid spec. A buyer with a preexisting relationship could have had that salesperson point them to sources of research that favor your competitor, thus setting the standard for the purchase. The road here is uphill.



What you must realize is this: When a buyer calls asking for a price, or even a demo of a specific product, he believes he has completed a substantial part of his own buyer’s journey and that he has completed it correctly. Whatever you do from here, you absolutely must respect the work he has done. If you do not, he will disconnect from you and buy elsewhere. Here are some ways to position yourself as a key part of the buyer’s process:

**(1) Show respect.** If you come off as a know-it-all or condescending, your buyer will immediately assume that you are trying to get one over on him (remember that 3% number) and either disconnect or make it incredibly difficult for you to impart your knowledge and expertise. Instead of saying, “How do you know that’s what you need?” ask a question like, “Wow, you’ve obviously done your homework! Knowledgeable customers make my life a lot easier. Just out of curiosity, would you mind telling me how you researched and found our product to be the one you need?” Hopefully, he will give you enough information to let you know exactly where he is in his journey.

**(2) Have two to three great questions to ask.** If your buyer believes that he already has the answers, he is not going to give you much time for a full discovery. What you need to do is have two or three really great, incisive questions to ask to pinpoint his needs. Sometimes, the answers to these questions will let you know that his research is right on target. Other times, it is wrong. If his research is on target, you may want to move ahead with him in his journey to the evaluation step. If he is wrong, a more gentle approach is needed.

**(3) If there's a pitfall, expose it — but in a different way.** Sometimes there are common pitfalls with products or services that nobody talks about and that you cannot easily find with internet research. These are things that your buyer must know. But remember, you have to respect his knowledge.

The approach here is to say: "Well, as much research as you've done, I'm sure you already know about X problem. Do we need to talk about that?" If the buyer is not aware, this could be a "Wait, what?" moment for him. Now you have credibility and can go back through the investigation phase.

**(4) Do not sell him the wrong stuff.** Sometimes you will go through as much due diligence and questioning as possible, and not only is your buyer determined to buy something that will not fix his problem, but he is also getting mad at you for attempting to guide him. This situation is no fun at all. Believe me, I have been there. Sometimes you have to lose a sale now to win a relationship later.

Politely but firmly explain to the buyer that, based on your experience and expertise, he will not get the result he is looking

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for and that you would rather not sell him something that will not meet his needs. Further, you hope that you can recontact him down the road.

Keep the relationship whole; few things build trust and credibility quite like refusing to make a sale. That is pretty much the opposite of the behavior of those salespeople who created that 3% trust statistic.

Joining the buyer's journey in the middle is a challenge. It is a challenge that becomes more common each day. As I always

say, when salespeople complain about the new trends in customers, get good at dealing with them and you can separate yourself from the pack. Within change lies opportunity. Let's capitalize on it. ■

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*He helps companies navigate the elements of sales on their journeys to success.*

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