

Thought Leadership



Banyan Tree Strategies

Acquiring A Customer of Significance

www.banyantreestrategies.com



Acquiring a Customer of Significance

The right new customer can change the financial trajectory of your company. How you are targeting your potential customers, and the type of dialogue you are having during your custom acquisition journey make the difference between merely surviving and thriving.

Our goal is to help you build a system that will allow you to acquire customers of significance that change the financial health of your company. [Banyan Tree Strategies](#) has 25 years of customer acquisition design (strategy) and human persuasion (tactics) experience. The industries we have assisted are professional services, software services, and consumer products.

The focus of this white paper will be on the dialogue that occurs between your company and the potential customer of significance (PCOS). We will not address the choosing of the PCOS here, we will assume that you have already identified your market, created your unique value proposition, and are looking to start winning business. The path to success begins with a question:

At what point are we introducing tension in our sales process and why?

The inherent tension in business is that the customer would like to have it for the lowest available cost that allows you to stay in business and service the account. You would like to be able to charge the highest possible price that the customer can pay and stay in business. In most cases you are faced with the sobering fact that someone else can do what you do: the buyer has a choice, and power. Thus, a market price for services is established, and you are both supported and constrained by the market price. How your company appropriately uses tension during the sales process determines how profitable you are within the boundaries of support and constraint.

The Plumbing of a Good Customer Acquisition Narrative

Your most profitable and above average clients are in a consensually interdependent relationship with you and your company. They have placed some amount of care in your hands. You are accountable to each other, and because of this a language gets built by the two of you about how much you like each other.

Consider a young couple who are recently married. They are now accountable to each other for life and want to feel good about the choice. They place stories around the relationship to honor its significance. One of the key stories lines that young couples memorialize is how they met.

Your company has a huge incentive to build a similar storyline around how your best clients decided to join forces with you. Your business wants to extend the lifetime value of a customer out as far as it can. Think through the opening dialogue and do not drop too much tension into the relationship at this point.

Can you think of an industry that drops tension in too early? Chances are the Life Time Value (LTV) of that customer is short.

Stage One – WHY

In stage one the potential customer of significance (PCOS) is unaware of your offer. The challenge here is how to make them conscious of your offer in such a way that they decide - in as short a time frame as possible – that they would like to become more cognizant of how you can solve one of their problems.

A question that you want to be answering in this stage is WHY?

The PCOS is asking, why should I care about your offer?

The history of sales is full of ways to engage a PCOS and make them aware of your offer. Most of them are horrible. Dirt on the carpet, a well-placed statement that makes them worry, or just an annoying phone call or relentless email to deal with. All these methods work off the principal that humans will move more quickly to avoid pain than to seek pleasure and the FUD brothers are willing accomplices. Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt are primary actors in stage one of many companies' sales processes.

We have found that the *Life Time Value* (LTV) of those customers is short, and thus companies should be wary of these tactics.

The key to a good start in stage one is a well understood thesis about what your PCOS needs might be and the outcomes they are seeking but not obtaining at this point. The reason they might speak with you is that they are actually in pain, they do have doubts, and they do dream of better outcomes.

The challenge you face is they don't have much of an incentive to share these internal issues with you until much later in the process - if at all. An astute PCOS is aware of the inherent tension in business, and thus will share only what they must.

Key Insight

Your course of action in stage one is to have a series of appropriate and open-ended questions that allow the PCOS to speak to their needs and outcomes first. Then, with a much better understanding of how their needs compare to other current clients you can begin to share.

You need to keep the WHY question in the back of your mind the entire time you are speaking. As you share your solutions relative to the needs and outcomes they expressed, you are constantly testing to make sure you are in sync.

Talk tracks are for politicians, you are in the *Call and Response* business. Share your knowledge in relation to their expressed needs, pause and ask, "does that make sense?" In musical terms you just called out and will now wait for them to respond back.

The key here is to give your knowledge a beat to sink in. The simple "does that make sense" question gives everyone in the room a chance to breathe.

Stage one can have many different names. We like the name *Discovery* because it gives off the non-threatening image of being open-ended. We are sharing time together to discover if our solutions and evidence match up with your current needs and desired outcomes. We know where the power exists currently - in the hands of the PCOS - and we know the very act of allocating this time with us means you are in some state of need or have interest in making a change or validating your current choices in our area of expertise.

When you get through the discovery calls, you should be able to have a fair discussion on whether there is enough evidence to move to the next stage.

This moment is when we suggest you add tension. That tension correlates to your time. Companies and sales professionals who respect their time get paid more for each minute of the day. Most buyers have all the time in the world on the front end of a purchase because they lose a lot of their power once they say yes.

Key Tactic

We suggest that you have a clarifying question or two that creates just enough tension with the PCOS at the end of the discovery stage. These questions signal to the PCOS that you are interested in moving to the HOW stage of the process, with the agreement that the WHY question has been answered.

At this point both the PCOS and your company have agreed that a need has been identified and an outcome defined. You have a solution that could fit and have shown evidence that you are experts in that area.

Your Call and Response habits that were used early in the discovery stage will now support you as you increase the tension with a more challenging call/question.

“If we can come to an agreement that our specs and solution match up with your customized needs on our next call, can you see yourself moving forward with us in the next three months?”

Then you SHUT UP. You use silence to advance your flank and, if you must, count to 10.

What you are doing at that moment is asking a question to come back to later if things unravel. Think of it in the terms of rock climbing. Your question and their affirmative answer are an anchor. Buyers will often exhibit bizarre behaviors throughout a sales process, but almost all will believe that they have integrity tied to their word. Astute sales teams use call and response to find agreement and purpose prior to moving to the next stage.

Stage Two - HOW

Stage two is often about answering the question of how would your solution work for us? We call this the *Deep Dive* stage. Everyone who is going to touch the solution at the PCOS is welcome at this stage.

Your rhythm for this segment begins with a reset of the agreement established at the end of your last call and moves to you asking further clarifying questions about how the PCOS is solving for your solution currently.

If you worked for Salesforce and sold their CRM, you might begin this call by understanding how the PCOS was using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets to track prospects and customers currently. The more you

can get them to describe the work flow and tools and team members used to solve the problem currently, the better you will be able to differentiate your offering when it is your turn to share.

A best practice in this phase is not to talk about what you do at each point, just collect the specifics of what they do and be patient.

Your deep dive is where you can shine and allow the technical people at the PCOS to ask all the geeky questions that make their lives work. You are Willie Wonka at the chocolate factory giving the tour and nothing the technical buyer says is going to get you off your game.

Key Insight (This is all standard stuff for us and we have done this before)

A couple of things are happening while your team is walking through the deep dive. One, everything you are doing is standard and done every day. The difference between what you do and what others do is all a part of your trademarked process for addressing a PCOS's need. The process was created based upon your company's deep understanding of your target PCOS's world. Your offering is standard and has a price and is customizable for an additional price. The hidden delta between your offering and their current solution is the mounting wall of tension that is building in their mind.

- Your sales process is creating an internal tension in the PCOS mind.
- What could their world look like with your solution?
- How much better could their margins be with this solution and at the scale of their company?
- What are the switching costs?
- Who else needs to buy in?
- How many other things are changing right now in the company and how much change is too much change?

All these questions are ringing in their ears while they get the tour of what they could have if only....

Key Tactic

Your call and response behavior have been working throughout the Deep Dive stage. You are checking for buy-in with short questions and using silence to get a response to allow learning to occur. What you are also doing is setting up the moment where you are going to stop the engines completely and start a different conversation that leads towards the finish line.

At some point, the tour stops, and you take a breath. Put the conversation in context by asking if what you have been discussing is either important or not. You are adding tension, but you are not part of the tension. Look to get the PCOS team to have the tension on the size of the problem that you have identified, compared with the ease of the solution that has been offered.

The key here is that unless the PCOS says that it is an important problem to solve nothing will ever happen. Even when they say it is an important issue it doesn't mean they are going to solve for it currently. Most PCOS have at least 10 identified problems that they are constantly living with. Think about your own home, do you have an attic that needs cleaning, a crack in the concrete in your driveway, or a fence that is close to falling over?

If you can't get this issue up the priority list and find a budget, you have nothing. Therefore, when you are solving for HOW would this work, what you are really setting up is WHEN are we going to implement it?

The main power you have in the Deep Dive section of the process is walk away power. Express your willingness to walk away in the discovery stage to have the right amount of tension in the Deep Dive stage. Your indifference in the Deep Dive stage is a veiled threat. Clearly you would like to onboard the PCOS, but only if you can get into that state of consensual interdependence.

Here we circle back to the beginning and the story starting to form in their minds on "how did you guys end up together." It is at the end of the How question that your indifference matters most. We can do this for you, and it appears it's important. If it is important, then let's set up the implementation timeline with joint accountability and move forward.

If not, good luck with the excel spreadsheet, we've got another company to talk to about rolling out our CRM. The best sales teams navigate this tight rope walk with ease, mostly because they have many prospects. Join, don't join, we are good either way.

The Nuance in Stage Two Separating the All-Stars from the Average Performers:

While you are helping the PCOS figure out HOW your solution might work for them, your company is testing for HOW important this is relative to all the other cracks the PCOS has in the driveway.

Stage Three - WHEN

The WHEN stage varies in importance depending on the size of the PCOS. If you are selling into a kingdom with one decision maker and a bunch of sycophants, you can go from WHY to WHEN at light speed. No one is going to get in the way of the king when he makes up his mind.

If you are selling into an enterprise with multiple decision makers and budgets the WHEN can be a challenge. There are always more solutions than budget dollars and even less face time with the decision makers. Who gets what dollars and who gets the IT department to help them implement their solution are typical road blocks.

Key Insight

Your key tools at this stage are an accountability timeline and a non-refundable customization fee.

Accountability is defined as who does what by when, and who do they tell about it?

Your company is set up with an entire sales and customer success team that knows how to onboard a PCOS for maximum joint success.

Your PCOS is not set up this way. They are focused on their own silos and budgets and needs. You need to understand all the nuances of each department and how bias drives their behaviors. They are not built to work together to onboard your solution. Think through the problem for them and build a path of least resistance that works at the time frames you can jointly agree to.

The non-refundable fee is the penalty that keeps everyone on track from the beginning of implementation to a full launch of your solution. Without the fee schedule you will get lost in a sea of noise and have no way to get people's attention who are part of the buying process, but only slightly involved in the benefits of the change. We have named this *Disinterested Party Theory* and seen for decades how people's focus dissipates as they get further from having an interest in the solution.

Your team needs to present the fee and hold your ground. If need be, have a return on investment calculator built and show them in a graph how within six months their ROI will have recouped the fee in revenue or improved efficiency. Whatever you do, do not start work without payment and an agreed upon timeline plus a senior person at the PCOS who will champion the project.

Key Tactic

Your services agreement includes the fee schedule and the implementation timeline which allows you to keep the appropriate amount of tension around the sale. This is important as services agreements can get lost in several departments like legal and finance. Your deal champion is the one who will keep things moving forward, and you have achieved a nice flank with the ticking timeline clock you started prior to releasing your services agreement to the PCOS.

Summary

Acquiring a PCOS can be a highly customized process for a company. You are looking for a great fit, the partner you will both be bragging about in the future. We have noticed that getting from those earliest stages to the signing of the first contract has some commonalities. We hope the three Stages of WHY, HOW, and WHEN provide a framework which might enable your future sales success.

We help companies pursue the path to re-mark-ability with their best clients. This includes being both architects and anthropologists of customer acquisition and success. We look forward to helping you tinker with and build a winning customer acquisition system that will transform the financials of your company, and the lives of those who work there.

Banyan Tree Strategies Sales Library and Customer Examples

West Coast Selling:
House Tour Sales Motion
Why-How-When

Built for Farmers Insurance
Built for D-Tools Software
Built for Effective Coverage

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