

A RainToday.com Special Report

**Kill Your Sales:
The 6 Most Costly Mistakes
You Are Making in 2009**

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Kill Your Sales: The 6 Most Costly Mistakes You Are Making in 2009

Data from: *How Clients Buy: 2009 Benchmark Report on Professional Services Marketing and Selling from the Client Perspective*

With Analysis and Comments from: Wellesley Hills Group

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Introduction

There are many business development tactics that work well for professional services: speaking, publishing, direct mail, referral programs, etc. At some point, however, every one of these tactics leads to the all important first (and possible second and third) conversation.

Much business development success and failure is decided here. Even the best professionals, experts in their fields who give great client service, struggle with turning first conversations into new clients.

80% of buyers experience at least one major problem during the professional services purchasing process

The obstacles and hurdles you must overcome are many, and service providers often get tripped up along the way making costly sales mistakes that are losing them new business. In fact, 80% of buyers say they experience at least one major problem during the professional services purchasing process.

In this special report, we've highlighted the **most common sales mistakes service providers make** - according to buyers - and provided tips you can use to identify where your challenges lie and succeed in selling.

At the end of the report, we've included links to more in-depth resources and programs that can help you improve your business development skills.

Costly Selling Mistakes—According to Your Buyers

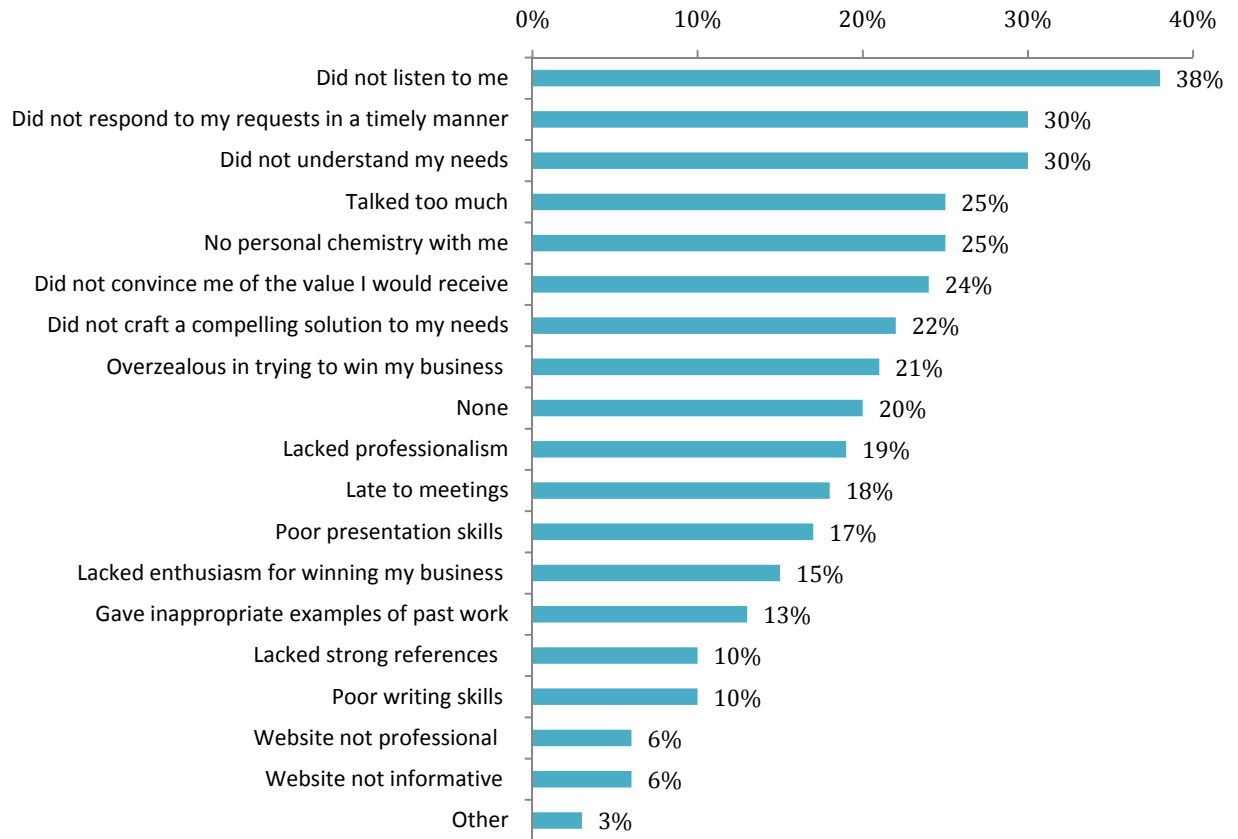
For most of us, if we want to improve our business development skills and behavior, there are dozens of potential areas of focus from which to choose. The difficult part usually is not identifying what we could improve; rather, it is knowing which areas would provide the most benefit for our energy if we worked on them.

To examine both the easier and the more challenging pieces of the puzzle, we asked 200 buyers of professional services:

1. Thinking of the last few times you selected a provider, which of the following problems did you encounter during the process?
2. If the provider had been better in this area, how would it have impacted the likelihood that you would have considered purchasing their services?

Taking a look at the service purchasing process from the buyer's perspective offers invaluable insight that you would be wise to consider in your own selling process.

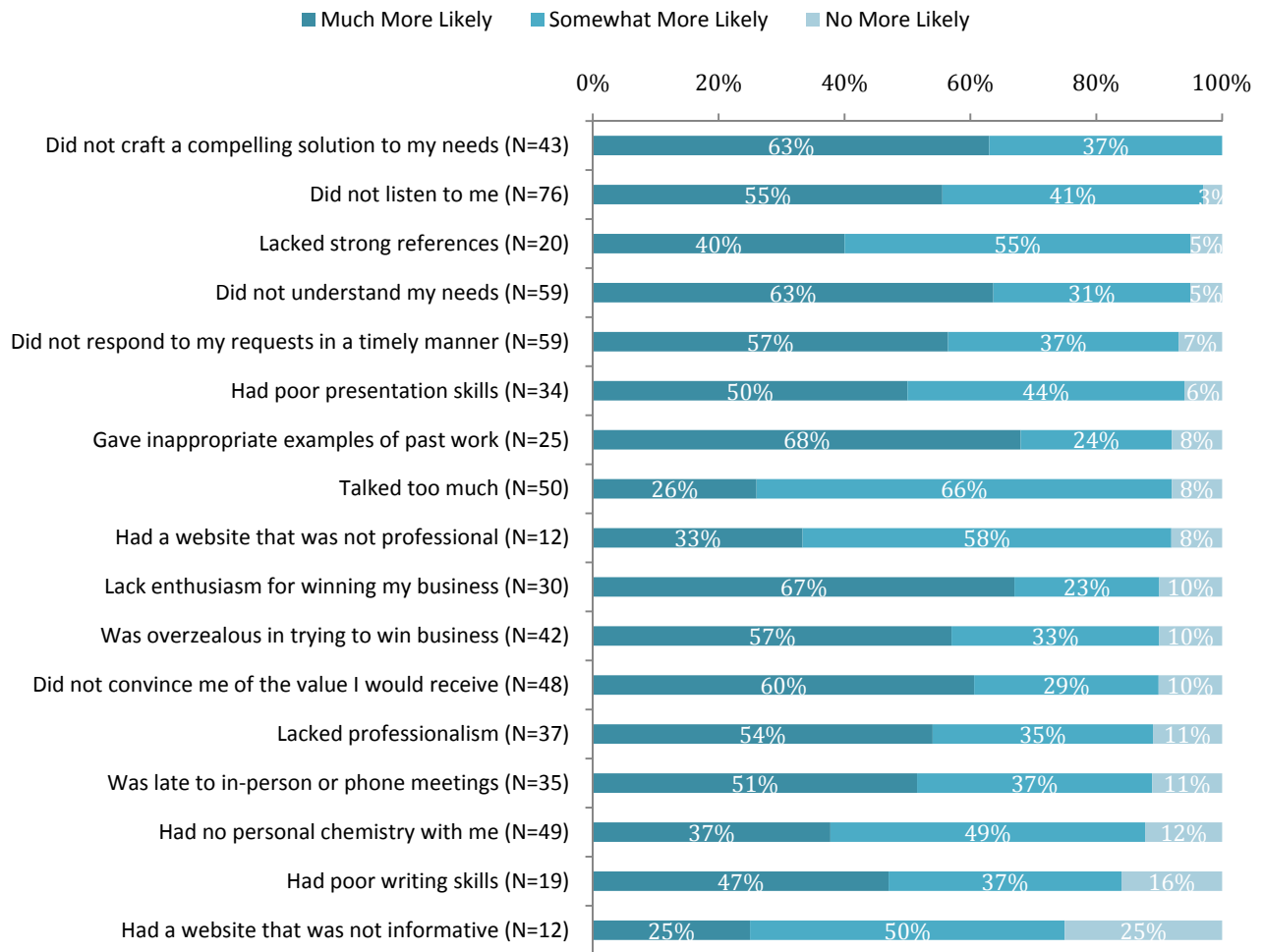
Problems Buyers Encounter during the Services Purchase Process



Now, you may be thinking to yourself, “I listen. I understand my clients’ needs. I get back to them quickly and act professionally at all times. These must be the mistakes of particularly bad consultants.” You may very well be a client satisfaction machine, pleasing clients with your charm, wisdom, skills, and promptness. But, don’t be too hasty in reaching that conclusion.

Likelihood of Buyer to Consider Purchasing Services, If Provider Improves Specific Problem Areas during the Hiring Process

Looking at the selling mistakes your buyers encounter only tells half the story. To help you focus your improvement on the areas that will have the greatest impact on your ability to close more new deals, we also asked buyers the likelihood of them choosing a provider if they were to improve in the specific problem area.



“Crafting a compelling solution,” “listening,” “strong references,” and “understanding needs” climb to the top of the list of factors that if improved could greatly increase your chances of winning new business.

Areas for Improvement

When we look at the two charts together, you can get a sense of not only which problems have the greatest impact on your ability to win new business if improved, but which problems are encountered most often. For example, 95% of buyers said they'd be at least "somewhat more likely" to purchase services given an improvement in your strength of references. However, only 10% of buyers say they experience this problem. Suffice it to say, when it comes to references, be sure to have them and have good ones, but don't spend too much time working to improve in this area.

To get a full picture of what's going on, look at the **most common AND highest impact problems**:

Sales Mistake	% of Buyers encountering this mistake	% "Much More Likely" to consider purchasing if improved in this area
Did not listen to me	38%	55%
Did not respond to requests in timely manner	30%	57%
Did not understand my needs	30%	63%
Talked too much	25%	26%
No personal chemistry with me	25%	37%
Did not convince me of value I'd receive	24%	60%
Did not craft a compelling solution to needs	22%	63%
Overzealous in trying to win my business	21%	57%
Lacked professionalism	19%	54%
Late to meetings	18%	51%
Poor presentation skills	17%	50%
Lacked enthusiasm for winning my business	15%	67%
Gave inappropriate examples of past work	13%	68%
Lacked strong references	10%	40%
Poor writing skills	10%	47%
Website not professional	6%	33%
Website not informative	6%	25%

To get started down the path of sales success, consider these six tips:

1. **Listen:** With 38% of buyers reporting that the service provider "did not listen to me" and 55% citing that they would be "much more likely" to consider the provider if they improved in this area, you need to examine your listening skills.

2. **Ask questions to uncover the full set of your clients' needs:** 30% of buyers said providers "do not understand my needs" and 63% would be "much more likely" to consider the provider if they improved in this area.

It is not surprising that both listening and understanding needs are together at the top of the list – understanding needs starts with listening and asking questions. Targeted and well-planned questions that explore specific needs, paired with active listening, can not only help you uncover the full set of the buyers' needs and wants, it will help you better understand their situation and craft the most compelling solution (see next tip).

3. **Craft compelling solutions:** If you are not listening and not uncovering the full set of client needs, it is no wonder that 22% of buyers say service providers, "did not craft a compelling solution." Furthermore, 63% of buyers would be "much more likely" to consider purchasing services given an improvement in this area (and 37% would be "somewhat more likely" for a whopping total of 100%).

If you can't uncover the buyers' needs, you are never going to be able to craft an appropriate solution. Fixing the first two mistakes will go a long way in helping you to improve this one.

4. **Don't be late:** 30% of buyers said service providers "did not respond to my requests in a timely manner" and 57% said they'd be "much more likely" to consider a service provider if they improved in this area.

This is inexcusable. When you make a commitment – stick to that commitment. Working with you in the sales process is a test run of what it is like working with you once they become a client. Being late in the sales process simply tells the buyer that you will be late when it comes to delivering your services. This is not the foot you want to be starting out on.

5. **Use examples wisely:** This may be a reminder for most of you since only 13% of buyers say they experience this problem. This is the problem with the highest impact - 68% of buyers said they'd be "much more likely" to consider a service provider if they improved in this area.

Examples can do a few things: when weaved into the conversation,

they show that you are listening and that you understand the need, and they demonstrate your experience and expertise in that particular area. For those of you who are using examples, think about how you can make them that much more relevant and powerful. Before meeting with a potential buyer, be prepared with specific examples of clients you've worked with in their industry or situation and then weave these examples into your conversation.

6. **Check your enthusiasm:** Buyers reported encountering service providers who are "overzealous in trying to win business" (21%) and, those who "lack enthusiasm to win business" (15%). An improvement in "lack or enthusiasm" would make 67% of those experiencing the problem "much more likely" to consider purchasing from you and 57% of those experiencing an "overzealous" provider would be "much more likely" to consider purchasing given an improvement. It seems trying too hard and not trying hard enough is the fine line service providers must walk.

Finding the perfect level of "just right" cannot be prescribed as a formula. You need to pay careful attention to the signals and attitudes of individual buyers and adjust accordingly.

While these six are the most common and highest impact problems, the fact remains that 80% of buyers experience at least one major problem during the selling process. One improvement in any of these areas can make a world of difference.

Where Do Your Challenges Lie?


Let's assume you have made the decision to address mistakes you may be making when you are selling. What do you do now?

First, get a sense of the specific problems that crop up when you are selling. Which errors do you typically make? Uncovering which problems follow you around isn't as easy as it sounds, but it can be done. To uncover your problems:


- **Be honest with yourself.** If you can't admit that you have any issues, no strategies for improving will work for you.
- **Educate yourself.** Become familiar with sales conversation best practices and apply those to your own efforts. RainToday.com's free newsletter and premium membership provide a wealth of resources to help in this area.
- **Make a list.** If you know what you are looking for, you are more likely to find it.
- **Pay attention.** Once you have your list, simply paying attention to where the problems are cropping up can help you uncover them.
- **Bring someone else along.** Sometimes you can't recognize problems in your selling process by yourself. If you bring someone else along to observe and then coach you, you are likely to not only uncover problems in your process, but to start solving them immediately.
- **Ask your clients and prospects.** Clients want to help you be a better service provider. Merely ask, "When we were in the process of figuring out whether we were going to work together, how did I do? Where could I improve? What feedback do you have?" This can actually strengthen your relationship.

Make sure you also contact (or have a third party contact) buyers who chose not to engage your services. What you learn from them may not only be eye-opening, it could immediately save you from continuing to make these costly mistakes.

Additional RainToday Member Resources

RainToday Members : [Login to your membership account](#) and access these resources for free to help you improve your selling skills.

1. [Secrets to Asking Questions and Uncovering Needs for Business Development](#) - On demand webinar
2. [Mastering Cold Sales Meetings: How to Turn Cold Prospects into Clients](#) - On demand webinar
3. [What Rainmakers Do: How to Bring in the Clients that Leave Your Colleagues in Awe](#) - On demand webinar
4. [Mastering Rainmaking Conversations](#) - E-Book
5. [Overcome Common Selling Challenges by Telling Anecdotes](#) – Two part article
6. [You Had Me at Hello: 9 Ways to Quickly Gain Trust During the Sales Process](#) – Two part article
7. [Sales Archeology: The Power of Asking Questions to Unearth Your Client's Past](#) – Article
8. [The Art of Listening: Dispelling Conventional Wisdom](#) – Two part article
9. [19 Techniques to Get More from Your Conversations](#) – Article
10. [How to Sell Professional Services: The RAIN Selling Seminar](#) – 2-day live training event – RainToday Members save \$200 on registration

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Serious about improving your business development skills?

2-Day Interactive Training Seminar

How To Sell Professional Services: The RAIN SellingSM Seminar

Attend this interactive, two-day seminar where you will be introduced to the strategies and skills that are the foundation of successful rainmaking. *How to Sell Professional Services: The RAIN SellingSM Seminar* is designed to help you and the people at your firm become the savvy business developers you know you must be to achieve selling and career success.

What you will learn:

- Questioning techniques that work for uncovering needs
- How to craft compelling solutions and proposals
- How to (and how not to) use the phone for selling professional services
- How to build rapport, the foundation for trust
- How to set meetings with qualified prospects
- Ways to develop and refine your positioning statement
- How to ask for commitment for new business
- Strategies for responding to objections

Benefits of attending *How to Sell Professional Services*:

- Gain new clients
- Deepen relationships and business with current clients
- Create new opportunities with prospective clients
- Increase the size of your engagements
- Lead masterful sales conversations from start to close
- Sell when you "have no time" to sell
- Develop powerful new business proposals
- Sell without becoming too "salesy"
- Overcome call reluctance
- Build and stick to business development goals

[View upcoming seminar dates, locations, and registration information.](#)