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# What Really Matters in B2B Selling

Customer Expectations of Their Vendors' Salespeople

**infoteam**  
THE SALES PROCESS ARCHITECTS

**E.A.Z.-INSTITUT**

<http://www.supersmous.co.za>

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# Foreword

A key success factor in the resource-intensive world of business-to-business selling is the ability of an organisation to execute an effective sales process. Excellent organisations go further, continuously reviewing their sales process to identify deficits, and eliminate them.

But, even good salespeople – the term used in this report for anyone responsible for the acquisition and development of customers – have trouble identifying areas for improvement in their own sales process. The normal metrics used to measure sales performance (revenue, number of wins and losses) help to keep score, but do little to improve the understanding of how or why the results were achieved. Thus, more than just metrics are needed to improve performance – insight into the sales process itself is required.

To better understand what really matters in B2B selling, Infoteam (an international consulting and training company specialised in sales process optimisation) surveyed sales leaders in 120 vendor companies across a wide range of industries. They were asked why they win or lose sales, and what they think their customers expect from their salespeople. At the end of the interview, each vendor was asked to suggest the names of 3-5 customers from recent wins or losses who would be willing to provide their point-of-view.

To conduct the customer interviews and publish the conclusions, Infoteam worked with the F.A.Z.-Institute, the research division of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, one of Germany's most respected daily newspapers. The F.A.Z.-Institute interviewed nearly 200 European business executives in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland and the U.K. Customer executives were asked questions on the same topics covered in the vendor interviews. Customer responses either validated or refuted what their vendors thought was important.

This study is unique in what it offers both vendor and customer organisations – an insight into what goes on in each others' minds during a sales cycle. It gives vendors an opportunity to understand what customers really expect, and identify potential areas for improvement in their own sales process. Customers have the opportunity to benchmark their own purchasing process, as well as understand vendor behaviour.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. As you will see, the comparison of vendor and customer responses reveals surprising results and a number of significant discrepancies. We hope you find the contents thought-provoking as well as a source of personal and professional improvement for you and your organisation.

*Infoteam Sales Process Consulting AG  
F.A.Z.-Institute*

# Executive Summary

- Salespeople need subject matter knowledge and industry expertise
- Customer specificity drives the sales process
- Delivery of value generates follow-on business
- Improvement comes through analysing failures

## **The Sales Professional – An expert in the customer’s business**

Increased competition and saturated markets put greater responsibility on salespeople, making it even more important that they possess the capabilities, skills, and knowledge their customers expect. **The customer organisations interviewed highlighted two critical areas in which they felt vendors’ salespeople fell short: knowledge of their own offering, and the understanding of the customer’s business, industry and specific needs.** Clearly, vendors should place greater emphasis on these areas in recruiting and training salespeople.

## **First Contact – Customer needs open doors**

One thing customers indicate very clearly is that the surest way for a salesperson to get a first meeting is to identify and focus on a real need. So, before making the first call, the salesperson must research probable customer needs as the basis for their approach strategy. Many customers also agree to a meeting as a way to keep up-to-date, providing a potential door-opener for vendors offering innovative new products or services.

## **First Meeting – Success through customer knowledge**

First impressions count. Customers indicate very strongly that salespeople’s abili-

ty to understand their specific requirements during a first meeting counts most. Many customers feel they are not understood, indicating that meeting preparation and execution should be more customer focused. Customers are most dissatisfied with this phase of the sales process – only 11% see no room for improvement in the way vendors prepare for and conduct first meetings.

## **Written Proposals – Solution and price at a glance**

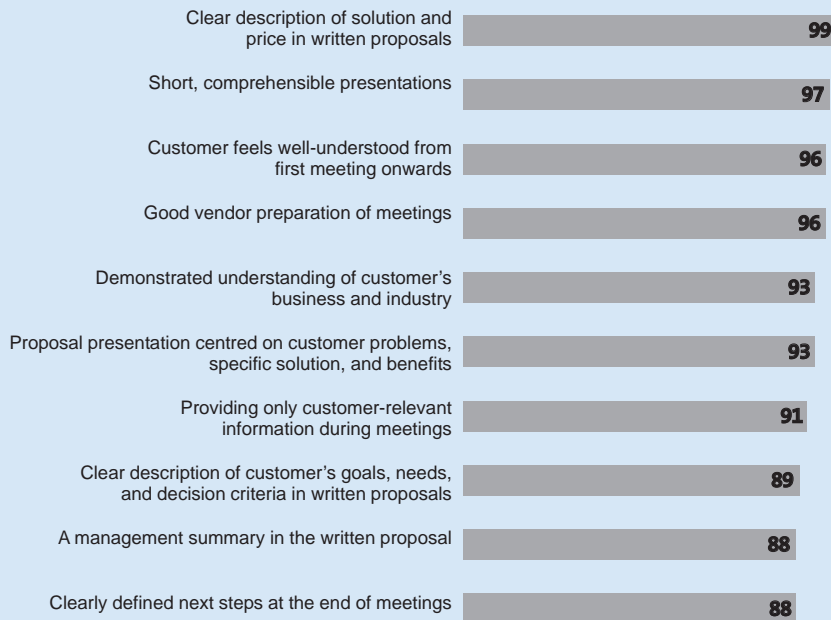
When evaluating proposals from multiple vendors, key decision makers have little time or patience to read long, boring documents looking for the information they need. **Brevity and clarity on solution and price are critical.** Furthermore, customers want a well-written management summary that helps project managers brief executives about potential suppliers and their bids. Once the basics are covered, the proposal’s customer specificity comes next in importance. Customers want confirmation that their needs have been understood and incorporated into the proposal. Only 15% of customers interviewed say they are completely satisfied with vendors’ written proposals, and see no room for improvement.

## **Proposal Presentation – Talk about the customer, not yourself**

Presentations must focus on customer needs and how the vendor will address

### Top 10 Customer Expectations

(Very important and important attributes of a vendor's sales process expressed as a percentage (%) of customers interviewed<sup>1)</sup>)



<sup>1)</sup> Customers were allowed to provide multiple responses

Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

them. All too many salespeople waste time talking about their company and product portfolio – including elements not relevant to the customer. Many customers complain that vendor presentations are too long, and that they have difficulty deciphering the solution to their specific problem – evidence that vendor and customer often do not speak the same “language”. Overall, only 20% of customers interviewed are satisfied with vendor proposal presentations.

### Contract Fulfilment – Foundation of future business

While the overwhelming majority of vendors surveyed say that their salespeople “feel responsible” for the successful execution of projects they sell, a much smaller proportion actively monitor whether the customer receives the benefits promised. **Ensuring customers actually get what they buy requires a systematic and comprehensive hand-over of both customer and project information from sales to operations.** Poor coordination between

a vendor's internal departments or a lack of understanding of the customer's goals and expectations in operations are both potential sources of customer dissatisfaction, and endanger follow-on business.

### Success and Failure – Learning from wins and losses

Progressive sales organisations learn from their successes and failures – using every customer “yes” and “no” to review and improve their sales process. **But only 7% of vendors interviewed systematically analyse wins and losses – potentially missing precious learning opportunities.** Many vendors are quick to blame losses on factors beyond their control, although most readily credit their own skills for wins. Most vendors appear not to know enough about their competitors, since the most frequent reason customers give for rejecting or changing vendors is the offer of a better solution.

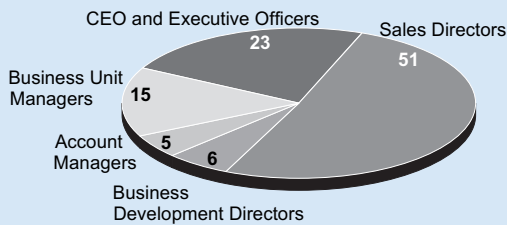
**Structure and Methodology**

The objective of this study is to analyse the success factors in the sales process from both the vendor's and customer's point-of-view. Two sets of interviews were conducted. First, Infoteam interviewed 120 vendors in Information Technology, Telecommunication, Manufacturing/Automation/Electronics, Management Consulting, and Other Services/Industries. Second, the Forsa Market Research Organisation (working on behalf of the F.A.Z.-Institute) interviewed 200 customers of these vendors using computer-aided telephone interview (CATI) technology.

A combination of choice-based and open questions were used in both vendor and customer interviews. For choice-based questions, the interviewee was given a number of possible answers. Depending on the question, the interviewee could answer with: Always, Frequently, Sometimes, Seldom, or Never. Alternatively, they could choose from: Very Important, Important, Less Important, or Unimportant. For open questions, interviewees were asked to provide a spontaneous answer about what they felt was most important in that area. Quite often, an open question followed a choice-based question to identify additional important points not covered by the choices provided. Due to the wide range of answers to open questions, the individual percentages tend to be lower for each category than with choice-based questions.

**Vendor Interviewee Job Function**

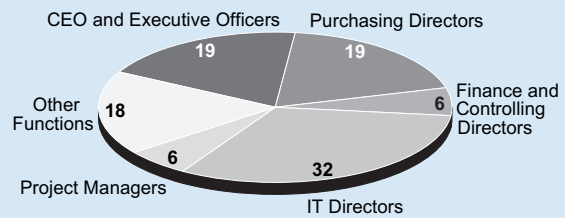
(As a percentage of vendors interviewed)



Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

**Customer Interviewee Job Function**

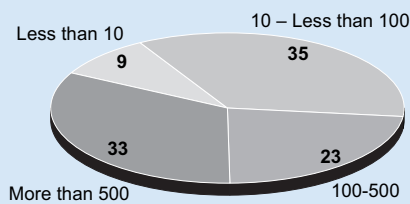
(As a percentage of customers interviewed)



Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

**Vendor Company Revenues**

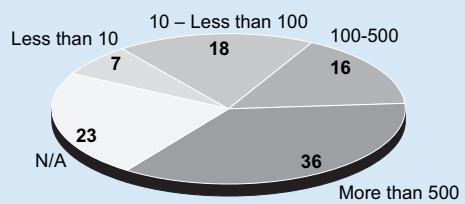
(In millions of euros in percentage of vendors interviewed)



Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

**Customer Company Revenues**

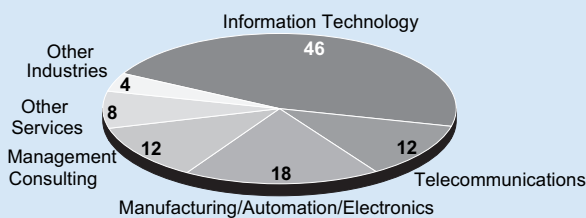
(In millions of euros in percentage of customers interviewed)



Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

**Vendor Industry Split**

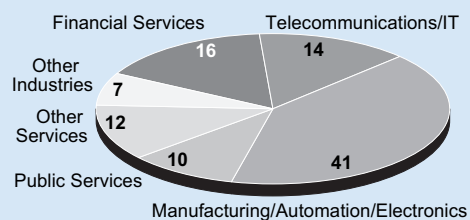
(As a percentage of vendors interviewed)



Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

**Customer Industry Split**

(As a percentage of customers interviewed)



Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

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# 1 The Sales Professional – An expert in the customer's business

Increased competition in saturated markets puts the spotlight on the sales force, whose role in the success of an organisation is now critical. Salespeople are the company's interface to its customers, are responsible for launching new products and services, as well as defending the company's market position and pricing with the right arguments.

*Subject matter expertise tops the list of customers' expectations.*

To succeed in their role, salespeople need a broad range of competencies. They must meet ever-growing customer expectations to maintain and increase sales volumes. But, what are the attributes of a successful salesperson from the customer's perspective, and how well are they reflected in vendors' recruitment and training practices?

At the beginning of each interview, customers were asked to spontaneously list the skills and competencies they expect from vendors' salespeople. Their responses show that little truth remains in the old saying, "A good salesperson can sell anything".

**Sixty-three percent (63%) of customers say that salespeople's subject matter expertise now tops their list of expectations.** Salespeople must have excellent knowledge of their company's products, and be able to position them properly, while answering questions and providing accurate advice. A salesperson that depends too heavily on specialists does not create credibility, but one who provides seemingly competent, but false, information does even more to damage their reputation.

Vendors seem to underestimate the importance of subject matter expertise to customers, as only 17% believe it is expected of their salespeople. Furthermore, only 10% of vendors state that they

specifically look for subject matter expertise during recruitment – ranking it fourth, well behind social and communication skills, at the top of their list. The discrepancy with the number of customers that expect subject matter expertise explains why nearly 20% spontaneously say vendors need to improve in this area.

**The greatest need for improvement is in salespeople's understanding of their customer's business, industry and specific needs.** Thirty-nine percent (39%) of customers express dissatisfaction in this area. Once again, there is a wide gap between customers' and vendors' points-of-view. Forty-eight percent (48%) of customers spontaneously say they expect vendor representatives to have a deep knowledge of their business and industry, and expect them to use this expertise to identify and understand their needs.

Vendors do seem to recognise the importance of customer industry and market expertise, as it ranks 2nd in what they think customers expect from their salespeople. But, only 15% of vendors specifically look for industry knowledge when recruiting salespeople. The large number of customers who feel industry expertise needs to be improved indicates that this type of knowledge cannot just be learned "on-the-job", but must be part of the competence a salesperson brings to the job. A lack of basic knowledge about the customer's business and industry negatively impacts

*Social skills top the list of recruitment criteria for vendors.*

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the chances of success in all phases of the sales process (see chapter 2).

There is a strong interdependence between the two areas mentioned above. **Salespeople without sufficient expertise about their products cannot address customer needs without the support of specialists. But even those who have deep knowledge will have difficulty unless they can relate it to the customer's business and industry.** Both skills are necessary to provide competent advice to customers.

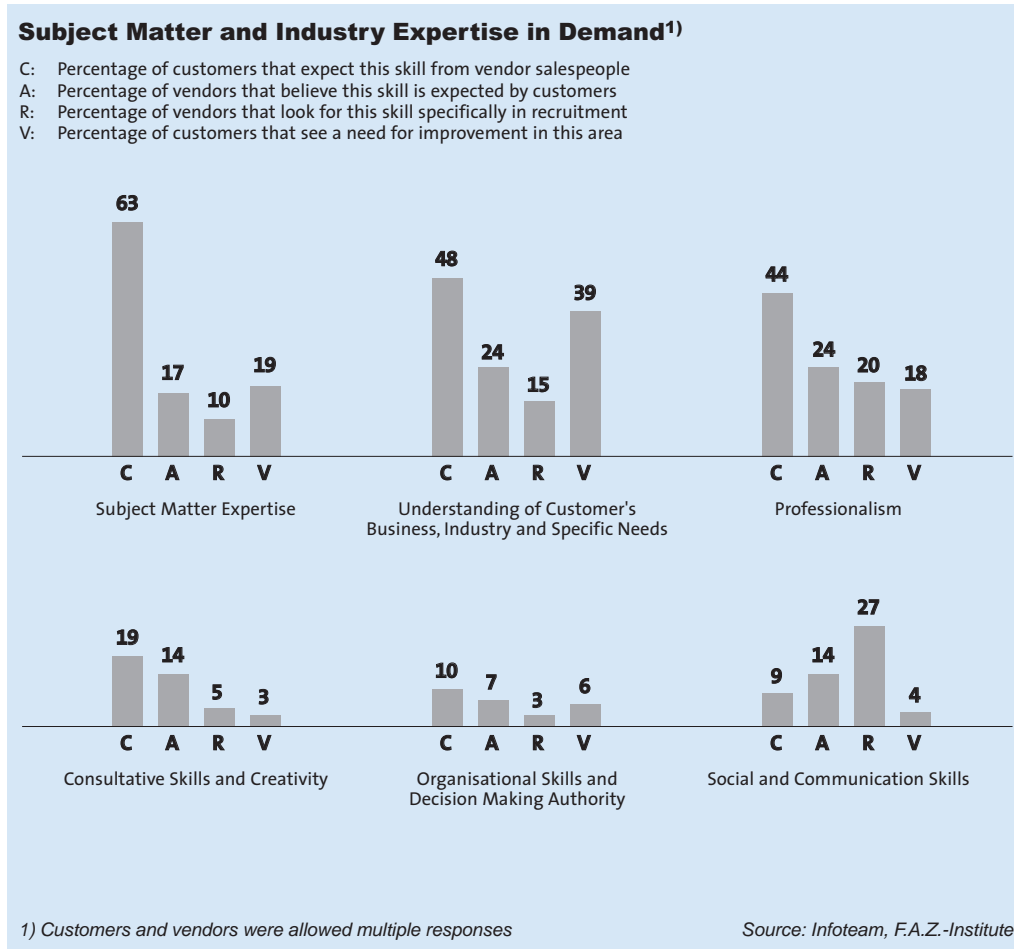
Nearly 20% of customers say that a salesperson's consultative skills and creativity are important to them. While vendors seem to recognise the importance of this to customers, they place very little emphasis on it during recruitment, ranking it just 6th overall. **Customers expect new ideas, and want to be challenged by their**

**vendors' salespeople.** Vendors should clearly place more emphasis on this in recruitment and people development.

Operational staff often view customer demands for creative solutions sceptically, preferring to work with standard offerings which are easier to implement and pose less risk. Vendors must decide how far they are willing to depart from standard solutions to win and keep customers. Salespeople, understandably, adapt their level of creativity to operate within the parameters defined.

*Salespeople without sufficient expertise about their products cannot address customer needs without the support of specialists.*

Furthermore, 10% of customers spontaneously say they expect salespeople to have good organisational skills and decision making authority. This underlies the expectation that salespeople can fulfil their promises, and have the necessary authority to mobilise resources as required.



<b>Skills and Competencies of Salespeople</b>	
<b>What Customers Expect</b>	<b>Vendor Recruitment Criteria</b>
1. Subject matter expertise	1. Social and communication skills
2. Understanding of the customer's business, industry and specific needs	2. Professionalism
3. Professionalism	3. Understanding of the customer's business, industry and specific needs
4. Consultative skills and creativity	4. Subject matter expertise
5. Organisational skills and decision making authority	5. Personal network in the target market
6. Social and communication skills	6. Consultative skills and creativity

*Source : Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.*

The low ranking (6th) of social and communication skills on the customer's wish list does not necessarily mean they are not important. Customers most likely take these skills for granted, and only make an issue of it when they are clearly missing. This explains why only 9% of customers mention this as being important.

However, the high ranking of these skills in vendor recruitment priorities could be

dangerous. Social and communication skills (27%) and professionalism (20%) both strongly influence how a sales candidate comes across during an employment interview. Interviewers should look beyond a candidate's pleasant and professional demeanour to focus on the key issues from their customer's perspective – product knowledge and customer's business and industry expertise.

### **Recruiting the Right People**

Companies that hire unsuitable people should not be surprised if their sales process does not work. But how can one evaluate skills such as subject matter, industry expertise and consultative skills if they are not listed on a curriculum vitae?

One way to evaluate whether customers will be satisfied with a salesperson's skills is to ask for references among their former customers. This is much more effective than certificates of employment or references from former employers.

Vendors should adapt recruitment and training practices to incorporate the issues most important to their customers. This requires HR departments and line management to fundamentally re-think sales recruitment policies and people development practices.

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# 2 The Sales Process – Key to success

The final decision is usually based on price, but this does not mean price is the only reason for winning. Price is an important decision criterion at the end of the customer’s decision process, but by that time, only the vendors who have earned the customer’s trust throughout all phases of the sales process are still in the race.

*The vendor companies who claim to win more than 75% of their sales opportunities use a structured sales process.*

Most vendor companies say they have a formal sales process, but **the key questions are how good it is, how well it is used, and how it benefits the organisation.** Nearly half of the 95% who say they have a structured sales process also say it needs to be improved. Only 7% say their sales process is fully understood and used daily by the sales force. A good sales process, however, appears to be key to success – all the vendor companies who claim to win more than 75% of their sales opportunities use a structured sales process.

Nearly one-third (32%) of vendors interviewed use a CRM system to support their sales process and are satisfied with the results. Slightly more than two-thirds (68%) say they either do not have a CRM system or want to improve the way it supports the sales process. **This implies that the maximum return-on-investment from many CRM systems has not been realised.** Apart from CRM systems, many pragmatic practices at each phase of the sales process can have significant impact on a sales organisation’s success.

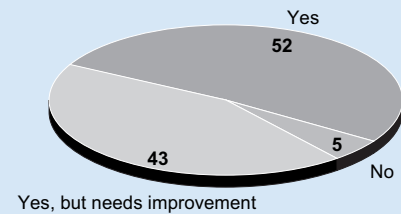
## 2.1 First Contact – Customer needs open doors

“We need to know more about the customer’s pains.” says an IT industry sales manager when asked about cold calling to obtain appointments. His comment high-

### The Structured Sales Process – Theory and Practice

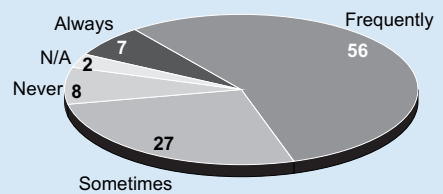
#### Does your company have a structured sales process?

(Percentage of vendors interviewed)



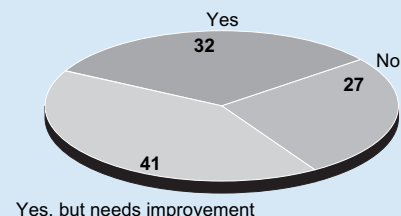
#### Is the sales process fully understood and used?

(Percentage of vendors interviewed)



#### Does your company have a CRM system that supports the sales process?

(Percentage of vendors interviewed)



Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

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lights the ultimate paradox for most salespeople – the information needed to get the first appointment is usually only obtained in the first appointment.

In the interviews, customers were asked what motivates them to grant a first meeting to a potential vendor when contacted by telephone. What these customers say can be applied to cold calls, as well as any other type of initial customer contact, such as the follow-up to event attendance or a letter.

According to customers, the best way for vendors to obtain a first meeting with them by telephone is to identify and focus on a real, current need. 59% “always” or “frequently” grant a first meeting if the vendor can refer to a concrete need during the phone call. But how does a salesperson identify concrete needs before the call? Focused research of the company and its people (what they say or write in the public forum), as well as leveraging knowledge of customers in the same industry sector can help identify areas of potential pain.

Close cooperation between the operations and sales staff is required to capture key information about customer successes – and use it to identify potential needs in target customers in the same industry. Operations must take responsibility for providing relevant information to sales about customer needs, solutions implemented, and benefits achieved. Many organisations lack a structured

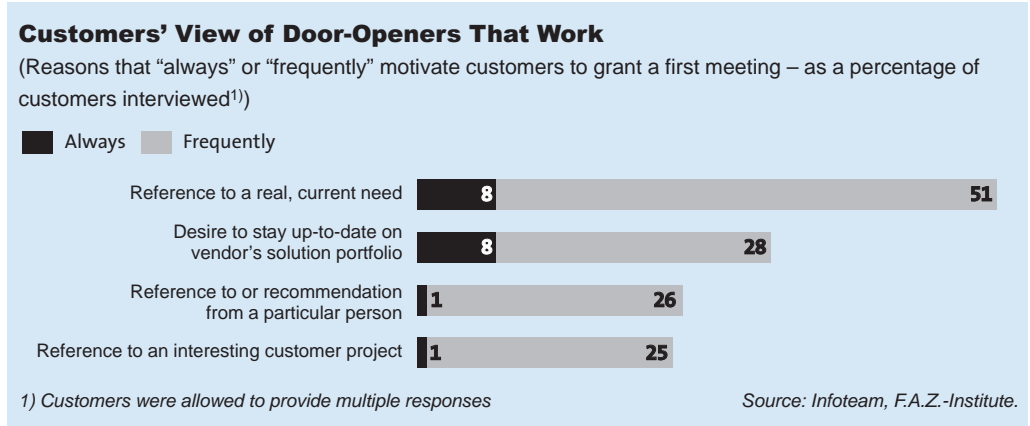
method to gather and leverage this essential information.

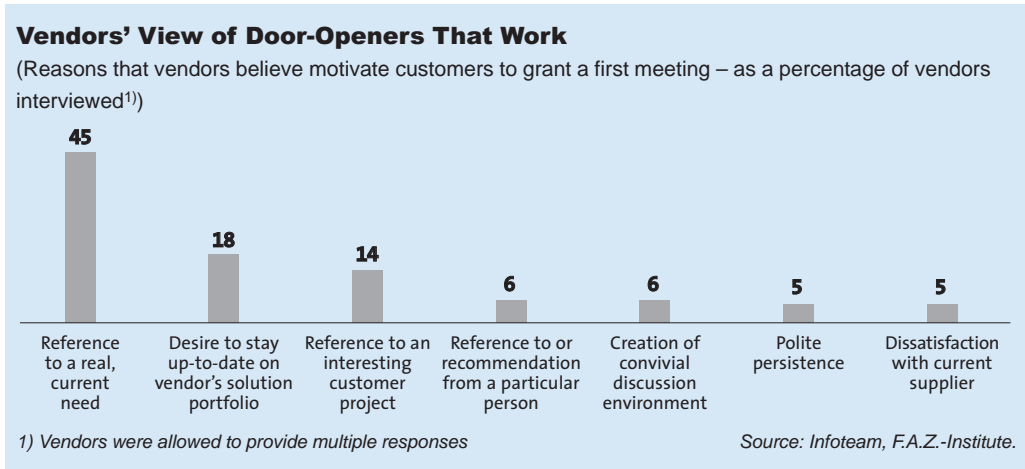
The second most powerful motivation for customers to grant vendors a first meeting is their desire to stay up-to-date on the vendor’s solution portfolio. Thirty-six percent (36%) say they “always” or “frequently” grant an appointment for just this reason. Market leaders, particularly the ones with strong brands, seem to be able to secure meetings without reference to a specific need, as their potential customers want to know what they are bringing to market. This implies that companies who do not enjoy market leadership must focus more on research to identify potential target customer pains.

Comparing the two following graphs illustrates that vendors seem to know what motivates customers to grant a first meeting. The first two reasons stated by both customers and vendors – reference to a real, current need and the desire to stay up-to-date – correlate completely. Unfortunately, no question was asked about how well this is actually done today.

The third reason customers grant first meetings is the reference to or recommendation from a specific person. The power of this type of approach appears to be underestimated by vendors, as evidenced by the difference in overall importance – 27% for customers and only 6% for vendors. Clearly, personal references and recommenda-

*The best way for vendors to obtain a first meeting is to identify and focus on a real, current need.*





tions should be used by vendors more frequently to gain access to new customers.

Apart from the choices provided in the graph on page 13, customers were asked about other reasons for granting first meetings. The product or service being offered plays the most important role as an alternative motivator for 39% of customers interviewed. The innovative nature of the product or service being offered is particularly significant. The study also shows that **one of the most common reasons for changing suppliers is the customer's impression that their current supplier's product or service is not up-to-date** (see chapter 4.2).

*Salespeople should demonstrate that they can deliver what customers expect.*

Finally, customers were asked specifically about their reaction to a persistent ven-

**The Power of Recommendations**

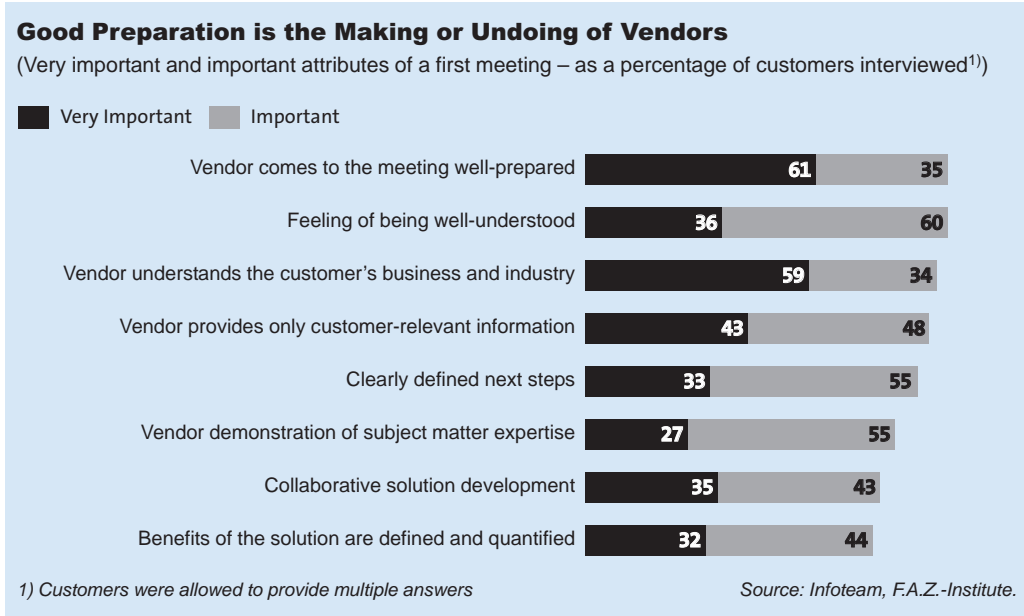
Vendors should use their personal network in existing customers more effectively by asking them to recommend other companies that might have similar needs. Satisfied customers may even be willing to provide a personal introduction. Very few vendors appear to make good use of this, as 43% of customers say their vendors rarely ask for recommendations (see chapter 3). It is clear that satisfied customers should be leveraged much more to generate new business.

dor who keeps calling. 77% of customers interviewed say vendor persistence does not lead to the granting of a first meeting. Vendors, however, believe persistency is as important as personal recommendations, and the creation of a convivial discussion environment. A final comment: Waiting for the telephone to ring does not appear to be a viable vendor alternative, as only 4% of customers say they prefer taking the initiative in contacting new vendors.

**2.2 First Meeting – Success through customer knowledge**

In the next phase of the sales process – the first customer meeting – salespeople should demonstrate that they can deliver what customers expect (see chapter 1). Customers seem to have very high expectations of vendors as all 8 of the attributes presented during the interview were seen as important.

Salesperson preparation and industry expertise are particularly important. 59% rate business understanding and industry expertise as “very important” and an additional 34% rate it as “important”. Good preparation is “very important” to 61% of customers interviewed, and “important” for an additional 35%. These figures speak for themselves – customers expect



**vendors to do their homework, and not to ask questions about things they should know from their preparation.**

Nearly half the customers interviewed see considerable room for improvement in these two areas (see graph on page 17). To improve customer satisfaction, salespeople should invest more time in researching the target company and determine potential strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in advance. Information regarding relevant references should be prepared, again highlighting the need for close cooperation with operations staff.

Time normally spent creating a comprehensive corporate presentation would better be invested preparing information on relevant reference projects. Hardly any of the customers interviewed (only 6%) expect vendor company information that is not related to their specific needs. More than 3 times as many customers (19%) want salespeople to come to the point quickly and avoid non-relevant topics. Monologue product portfolio presentations so often used to open first meetings actually have a negative impact from the customer's point-of-view.

After the choice-based questions, customers were provided the opportunity to list other attributes of good first meetings. A convivial discussion environment and the feeling of "good chemistry" between salesperson and customer are important for 22%. It appears that vendors again underestimate the importance of this, as only 6% name it as an important attribute of a good first meeting, ranking it 9th overall, thus falling off the graph of the "top-8 attributes".

**Vendors dramatically underestimate the importance of how well the customer feels understood during the meeting.** Just 2% of vendors spontaneously volunteered this as an attribute of a good meeting, whereas 96% of customers find this important or very important. So, it is hardly surprising that 44% of customers expect vendors to do a better job in this area.

Vendors tend to focus much more on the identification of sales opportunities and the definition of next steps. Customers also want clearly defined next steps, but it is more important to vendors (2nd) than customers (5th). Salespeople should place more emphasis on ensuring that actions agreed with customers are followed-up. This highlights the importance of good organisational skills and

*Customers expect vendors to do their homework, and not to ask questions about things the vendor should know from their preparation.*

<b>Attributes of a Good First Meeting</b>	
<b>Customer's Perspective</b>	<b>Vendor's Perspective</b>
1. Vendor comes to the meeting well-prepared	1. Salesperson understands customer needs
2. Feeling of being well-understood	2. Clearly defined next steps
3. Vendor understands the customer's business and industry	3. Salesperson comes to the meeting well-prepared
4. Vendor provides only customer-relevant information	4. Sales opportunities are identified and qualified
5. Clearly defined next steps	5. Active listening and less talking
6. Vendor demonstration of subject matter expertise	6. Salesperson provides only customer-relevant information
7. Collaborative solution development	7. Salesperson understands customer's business and industry
8. Benefits of the solution are defined and quantified	8. Benefits of the solution are defined and quantified

*Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.*

decision-making authority (see chapter 1), as well as understanding the capabilities of their organisation, to ensure commitments are realistic and feasible.

limit benefits to qualitative factors – quantification can increase the sense of urgency and help the customer position the project internally. Quantifying benefits, thus, serves both vendor and customer.

*Only salespeople with true subject matter expertise can balance the need for creative solutions with feasibility.*

Subject matter expertise is “important” or “very important” for 82% of customers interviewed. **Only salespeople with true subject matter expertise can balance the need for creative solutions with feasibility.** It is also prerequisite for another key customer expectation – the collaborative development of solutions, which 78% consider “important” or “very important”. The definition and quantification of benefits is “important” or “very important” for 76% of customers interviewed. Vendors should not

Overall, only 11% of customers are satisfied with the quality of first meetings. Satisfaction increases as the sales process unfolds, rising to 15% when written proposals are submitted, reaching 22% when they are presented. An important consideration here is that as the sales process progresses, unsuitable vendors will have been eliminated, and proposals will likely only be requested from those the customer seriously considers as a partner for the project.

### **The Difference between Understanding and Being Understood**

To build the feeling in the customer's mind of being understood, vendor salespeople must possess and combine numerous competencies – such as tailoring their industry expertise to meet the customer's specific requirements. Customers are often unclear about their own requirements, and appreciate salespeople with the consultative skills to help them develop and articulate their needs in a collaborative environment.

A word of caution about using standard templates for company presentations or “reference” projects not relevant to the customer: Though this may be efficient, there is significant danger of “disconnection” with the customer.

Using customer language (rather than vendor-centric terminology) enhances the feeling of being understood. Making the investment to internalise customer language throughout the sales process pays dividends in the trust level achieved.



These statistics show how important the first meeting really is – and since 89% of customers are dissatisfied in this early phase, management should focus coaching on improving this area, rather than only getting involved at the end of the sales process when contracts and prices are negotiated.

### 2.3 Written Proposals – Solution and price at a glance

Customers have very clear ideas of what makes a good proposal and what is just “ballast”. **A complete, well-structured and comprehensible description of the solution and price are the core elements expected.**

More than 70% want to see at a glance the solution proposed, and how much it costs. Although vendors also rank these criteria highly, 43% of customers say vendors fall short of their expectations.

Two potential reasons may explain the high degree of customer dissatisfaction – first, vendor and customer do not share a common definition of “completeness”, “good structure”, and “comprehensibility”, and second, that despite having a common definition, vendors fail to deliver.

Moreover, customers want vendors to incorporate their specific goals, needs, and decision criteria into proposals. More than

20% of customers see a need for improvement; again despite the fact that vendors agree it is important. Vendors either don’t incorporate this information into the proposal, or more likely, do not adequately understand the specific needs of the customer.

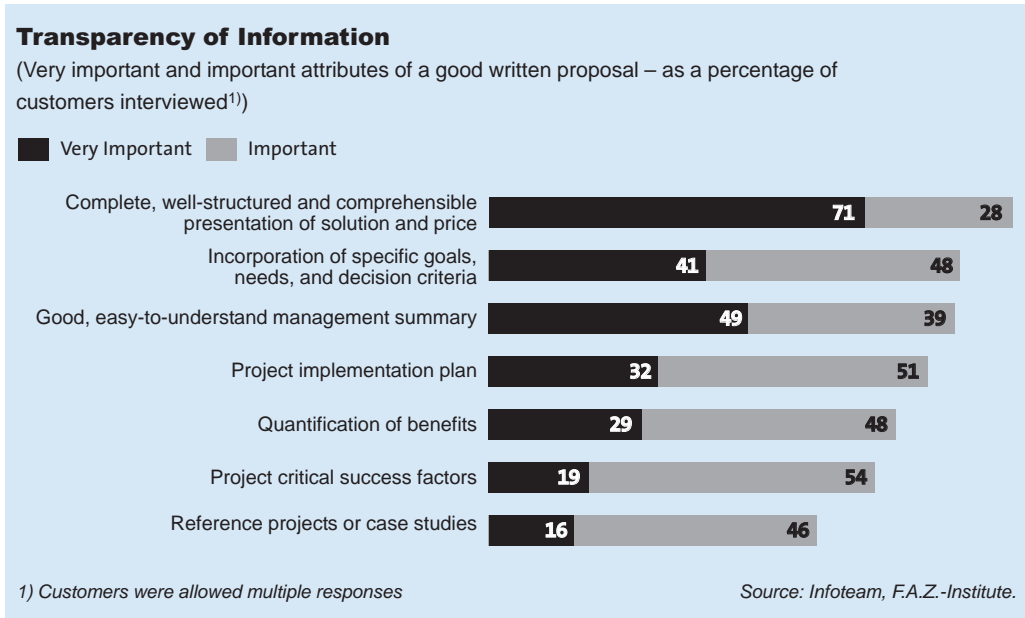
One cause may be **poor internal communication – people writing the proposal are not the same ones meeting the customer, or information is not systematically exchanged between team members.** Another cause is the sales team’s **lack of contact with the real decision makers** before submitting the proposal and the resulting failure to incorporate their expectations.

A good easy-to-understand management summary covering all the key points of the proposal is considered to be “very important” by 49% of customers, and “important” by an additional 39%. This reflects the high proportion of senior executives interviewed in customer organisations.

The management summary also provides project managers a tool to brief their superiors. Given its importance to customer executives and project teams, it is surprising that only 7% of vendors feel it is necessary to include one – making this an easily addressable area for improvement.

*A complete, well-structured and comprehensible description of the solution and price are the core elements expected.*

*Customers want vendors to incorporate their specific goals, needs, and decision criteria.*



Vendors understand that a lack of financial arguments can cause project delay or cancellation.

Fourth on the customer wish list is a project implementation plan. In response to the open question regarding attributes of a good proposal, only 2% of vendors say that a project plan is important – this clearly indicates a significant gap that should be addressed. **A comprehensive project plan outlining timing, skills, resources, and roles (vendor and customer), as well as contingencies, demonstrates vendor experience, and increases customer confidence.**

As expected, customers facing increasing economic pressure want vendors to quan-

tify the benefits of their solution (rank 5), while vendors rank it 6th overall. One-third of customers say the lack of quantified benefits in a vendor proposal is “always” or “frequently” a reason for its refusal (see chapter 4.1). Vendors appreciate that a lack of financial arguments can cause project delay or cancellation, while compelling “why now” arguments can help customers justify projects internally, and shorten the decision process. Moreover, this improves competitive differentiation, an attribute ranked 3rd in importance by vendors.

### Attributes of a Good Written Proposal

Customer’s Perspective	Vendor’s Perspective
1. Complete, well-structured and comprehensible presentation of solution and price	1. Complete, well-structured and comprehensible presentation of solution and price
2. Incorporation of specific goals, needs, and decision criteria	2. Incorporation of specific goals, needs, and decision criteria
3. Good, easy-to-understand management summary	3. Customer benefits and competitive differentiators
4. Project implementation plan	4. Good visual presentation
5. Quantification of benefits	5. Good, easy-to-understand management summary
6. Project critical success factors	6. Quantification of benefits
7. Reference projects or case studies	7. Good price-performance ratio

Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

## Supplied by; QuadS representing Infoteam in Southern Africa

Greater discrepancy still is found in the vendor and customer view on including project critical success factors. Customers want to know where project risks lie and rank this 6th, while vendors seem to forget or ignore them altogether. Addressing this professionally creates trust, while ignoring it might give the impression of having overlooked important details.

Although information on reference projects in the proposal seems to have less importance for customers than other factors (rank 7), 46% still consider it to be “important” and another 16% “very important”. From the vendor’s perspective, including appropriate references only occupies position 10 on their list of priorities.

This discrepancy may, again, be caused by the lack of a common definition for what constitutes a “reference”. Many vendors include a list of customer names as part of the company presentation, but what customers want is detailed information on selected projects that demonstrate the vendor’s ability to deliver successfully. The recommendation to vendors is to focus on a smaller number of more suitable references, and to provide more comprehensive information on that

### Dealing With Critical Success Factors

Frequently project critical success factors are not uncovered by the vendor prior to proposal submission. One reason may be that project team members are not involved in the sales process or that their advice is not taken into account. Even if critical success factors are known, the fear of losing the project often leads salespeople to omit them from the proposal. This pre-programs problems into the project from the outset.

Rather than creating doubt, vendors who proactively show that they understand and can address project critical success factors increase their credibility. Even more so if they can refer to a project in which the same issues were resolved.

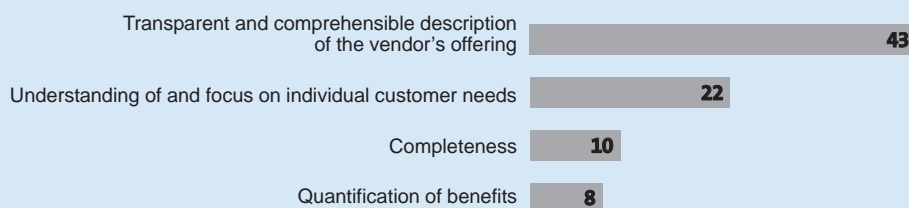
*The recommendation to vendors is to focus on a smaller number of more suitable references, and to provide more comprehensive information.*

customer’s goals, solution, project plan, benefits achieved, and how the critical success factors were overcome.

Just 15% of customers interviewed see no room for improvement in vendor proposals, so the vast majority of vendors could potentially improve the quality of their written proposals using the checklist outlined in this chapter.

### Better Comprehensibility Desired

(Spontaneous customer answers regarding areas for vendor improvement in proposals – as a percentage of customers interviewed<sup>1)</sup>)



<sup>1)</sup> Customers were allowed multiple responses

Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

**The Vendor's Go / No-Go Decision – Staying in the Game at Any Price**

Significant resources are invested to create a good, customised proposal and presentation. **So, vendors should only pursue sales opportunities in which they have a realistic chance of winning.** Selling risks should be identified early – and if they are unacceptable or cannot be mitigated, the logical conclusion is to discontinue (no-go decision).

Although 88% of vendors interviewed say their company has a process for making no-go decisions, only 28% say it is applied consistently. This implies that **considerable resources are wasted pursuing sales opportunities with a low probability of success** – making them unavailable for opportunities that have a higher probability.

Many companies use poor market conditions to justify pursuing all opportunities. When few projects are available in the market, the temptation is to put aside the no-go decision process and simply pursue them all. But, a hopeless project remains a hopeless project, so every cent invested is money down the drain.

Even companies that do have a no-go decision process should review the criteria used. The criteria vendors consider important indicate that many key factors are ignored. **Analysis of competitors is at the bottom of the vendors' list. However, customers say that the most frequent reason for refusing a vendor's proposal is the superior solution offered by their competitor** (see chapter 4.1). Moreover, 65% percent of projects are "always" or "frequently" awarded to a customer's current supplier (see chapter 4.2).

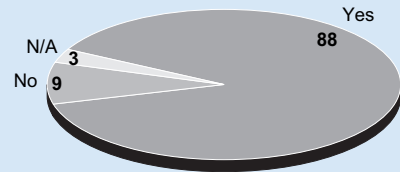
Given the importance of competition in the success or failure of a vendor's sales campaign, it is surprising that only 51% evaluate the competitive situation thoroughly before deciding to engage. The most important no-go decision criterion, the ability to fulfil the customer's requirements, can be of limited value if the competitor has a far superior solution.

In summary, a company's no-go decision process must be based on the right criteria, and used by management to focus the organisation on the right opportunities. Precious company resources may be wasted if salespeople are only measured by the number, rather than the quality, of opportunities in the pipeline.

**Consistent Application of No-Go Decision Criteria**

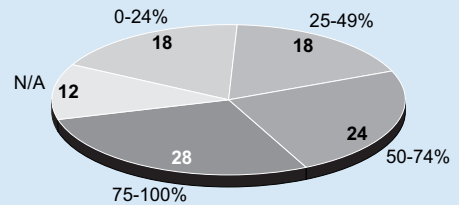
**Does Your Company Have a No-Go Decision Process?**

(As a percentage of vendors interviewed)



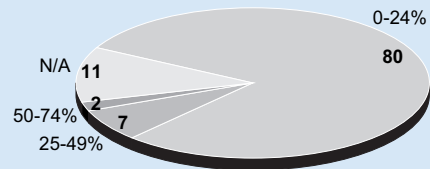
**What Percent of Your Salespeople Consistently Apply the No-Go Criteria?**

(As a percentage of vendors interviewed)



**In What Percent of Sales Opportunities Is a No-Go Decision Made?**

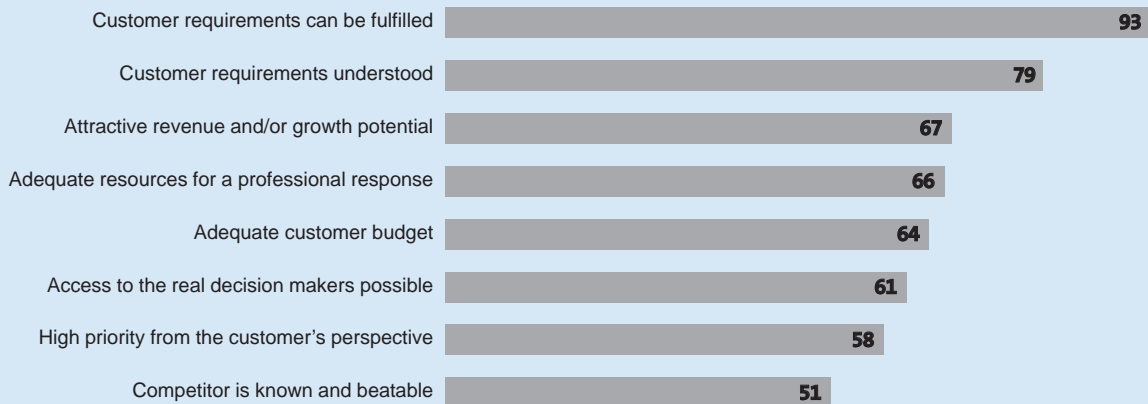
(As a percentage of vendors interviewed)



Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

**Competition Not Evaluated Seriously**

(Important and very important criteria in the decision to continue investment in a sales opportunity – as a percentage of vendors interviewed<sup>1)</sup>)



1) Vendors could provide multiple answers

Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

## 2.4 Proposal Presentation – Talk about the customer, not yourself

Customers and vendors both believe that a good proposal presentation should be short, comprehensible, and tailored to the specific needs of the customer. Despite the high level of agreement, nearly a quarter of the customers see a need for shorter and more comprehensible presentations.

93% of customers interviewed consider it “very important” or “important” that their needs and the specific solution should be the centre of the vendor’s presentation.

Furthermore, a third of them are not satisfied with the degree to which their vendors do this today. The discrepancy indicates that customers and vendors either have very different perceptions of what constitutes a “comprehensible”, “customer-focused” presentation or that vendors do not execute what they say is important.

Third on the customer wish list is that vendors should incorporate the individual requirements of the decision-makers into their oral proposal presentations, with 79% saying it was “important” or “very important”. Vendors, however, only rank this 6th, placing it outside the most important attributes on the list.

This should be given more attention by vendors – as it highlights a particular attribute of B2B selling. In contrast to selling to end

### Using the Right Language

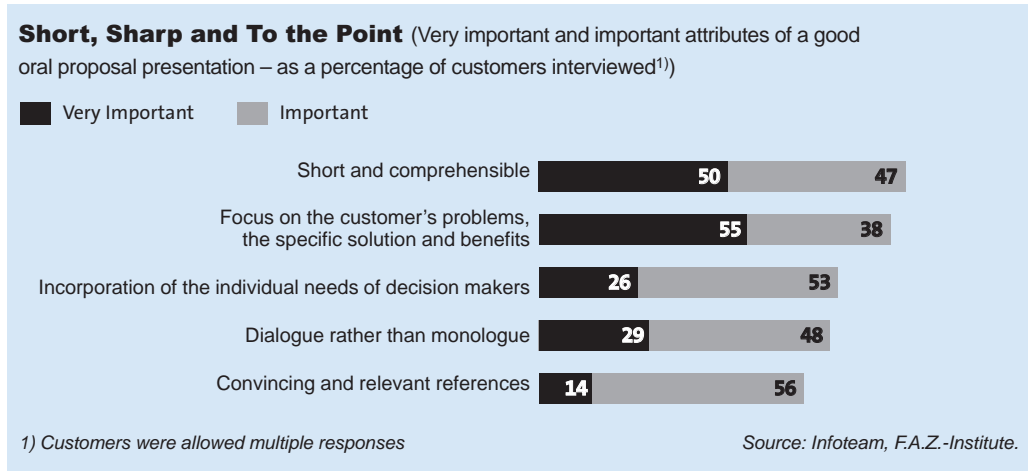
Using the customer’s language is a key factor in making presentations more comprehensible. This means replacing vendor-centric terms with customer terms learned during the sales process. Contradictory statements from different selling team members can confuse customers and give them the impression of a lack of coordination, setting a negative expectation which may carry over to project delivery. To avoid this, the team members should coordinate their individual contributions better, and rehearse “one voice” to the customer.

*Decision makers at different levels do not necessarily have the same needs and requirements.*

consumers, selling to a company involves a number of decision makers, each of whom must be convinced of the advantages of the same product or solution. Decision makers at different levels do not necessarily have the same needs and requirements.

Active involvement in the presentation is “important” or “very important” to 77% of customers interviewed and 9% complain about the lack of a constructive dialogue during proposal presentations. To improve the degree of satisfaction, vendors should actively ask for feedback during presentations, and, ideally, integrate the feedback into their presentation in real-time.

From a vendor perspective, having a credible team with the necessary subject matter and industry expertise ranks 3rd – customers also rank this quite high, but it



### Attributes of a Good Oral Proposal Presentation

#### Customer's Perspective

1. Short and comprehensible
2. Focus on the customer's problems, the specific solution and benefits
3. Incorporation of the individual needs of decision makers
4. Dialogue rather than monologue
5. Convincing and relevant references

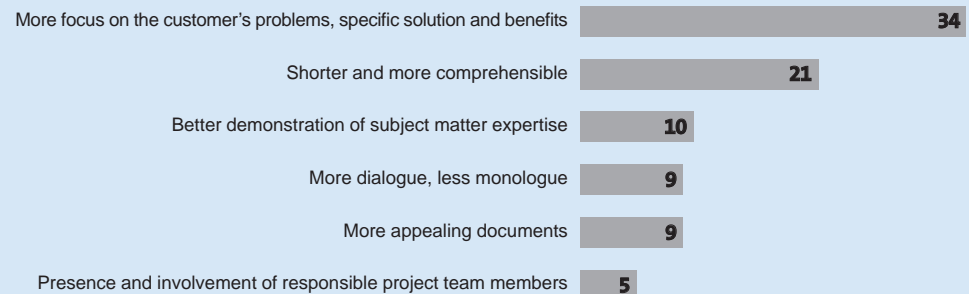
#### Vendor's Perspective

1. Focus on the customer's problems, the specific solution and benefits
2. Short and comprehensible
3. Credible team with subject matter and industry expertise
4. Good presentation style – supported by appealing documentation
5. Good preparation for questions and objections

Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

### The Customer as the Focus

(Spontaneous customer answers regarding areas for vendor improvement in oral proposal presentations – as a percentage of customers interviewed<sup>1)</sup>)



1) Customers were allowed multiple responses

Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

*Ideally, answers to potential questions and objections should be prepared in advance and incorporated into the presentation to prevent them being raised at all.*

was not among the 5 choices initially presented in the interview. However, when asked about other important attributes, 18% say that the credibility of the team and their ability to demonstrate subject matter and industry expertise is "important". Even more customers spontaneously say that the visual presentation of documents provided is important, corresponding well to the vendors' ranking in 4th position. Preparation for questions and objections – 5th on the vendor list – is understandably only important from the vendor perspective. Ideally, answers to **potential questions and objections should be prepared in advance and incorporated into the presentation to prevent them being raised at all.**

### Access to the Real Decision Makers

The customer's expectations of good oral proposal presentations can only really be fulfilled if the vendor has had access to and understood the specific needs of key decision makers before the presentation. **This requires advanced selling skills as customers rarely make that suggestion themselves.** Already at the first meeting, the vendor should inquire about the decision making process to find the names of the Endorser, Decider, Assessors, and to ask how best to go about understanding their needs. Vendors must be careful not to give customers the impression they are being "spied on", and make it clear that the contacts are required to make a good proposal, which also benefits them.

Supplied by; QuadS representing Infoteam in Southern Africa

# 3 Contract Fulfilment – Foundation of future business

The proposal and presentation have convinced the customer, and a handshake has sealed the deal – the salesperson who considers their work done is sadly mistaken, and will have great difficulty developing additional business. **The customer's experience with a vendor during contract fulfilment heavily influences their desire to entrust the vendor with more business.**

*Value propositions are mainly used as a sales tool for winning business.*

There is a surprisingly high correlation between customer and vendor responses as to the frequency with which contract fulfilment and account development activities occur. 87% of vendors say their salespeople “always” or “frequently” take responsibility for successful contract fulfilment, and 74% of customers concur. Both parties agree on the frequency (only 47%) with which salespeople validate whether the benefits promised are achieved.

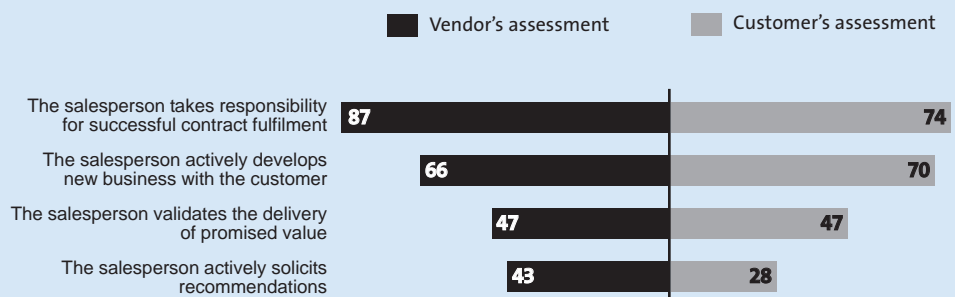
It appears that **value propositions are mainly used as a sales tool for winning business, but are rarely shared with or reviewed by the operations staff that are responsible for delivering them.** En-

sureing that the expected benefits are delivered is an important prerequisite for a continuation of the vendor-customer relationship – customers who feel they do not get what was promised may be hesitant to award the vendor additional business.

Perhaps putting the cart before the horse, 66% of vendors say their salespeople actively develop new business with existing customers, but only 47% ensure that the contracts already sold deliver the value promised. The majority of vendor interviews were conducted with sales managers and executives, which may have injected a bit of wishful thinking into the account development figure.

## What Happens After Contract Signing

(Contract fulfilment and account development – percentage of interviewees who say these actions occur frequently or always<sup>1)</sup>)



1) Customers were allowed multiple responses

Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

### **Know-How-Transfer between Sales and Operations**

Sales and operations teams must work together more closely – ensuring that expected benefits are communicated internally to operations staff that are responsible for delivery. **If operations staff only receives the contract and not the value proposition on which the customer based their decision, customer and delivery team dissatisfaction may be built into the project from the outset, affecting project efficiency and implementation costs.**

Failing to validate whether the project delivers the value promised means that salespeople lack access to important customer satisfaction information which supports their targeting of new customers in the same industry. The strategy for vendors must be to sell what they can deliver, and ensure systematic sharing of relevant customer information between sales and operations.

Although both customers and vendors say that salespeople actively try to grow the business, satisfied customers are rarely asked for recommendations. Only 28% of customers interviewed are “always” or “frequently” asked by vendor salespeople for recommendations, while 43% say this

is “seldom” or “never” the case. Vendors are clearly missing potential sales opportunities, since the analysis of successful strategies for first contacts shows that recommendations are very effective (see chapter 2.1).

# 4 Success and Failure – Learning from wins and losses

At the end of the sales process the vendor receives a “yes” or “no”. Regardless of the outcome, careful analysis of the reasons behind the customer's decision is an important aspect of a sales organisation's work. **Learning from wins and losses is the best way to improve the sales process and prevent mistakes from being repeated.**

## 4.1 Acceptance or Rejection – A question of competition

*Research clearly indicates that vendors should spend more time and effort to understand the strengths and weaknesses of other competitive solutions.*

“Why do we lose?” many vendors ask themselves. “Competition” is the answer given by 79% of customers “always” or “frequently” – saying that a superior solution or better price is the most common reason. This contrasts with just 50% of vendors who feel this is the

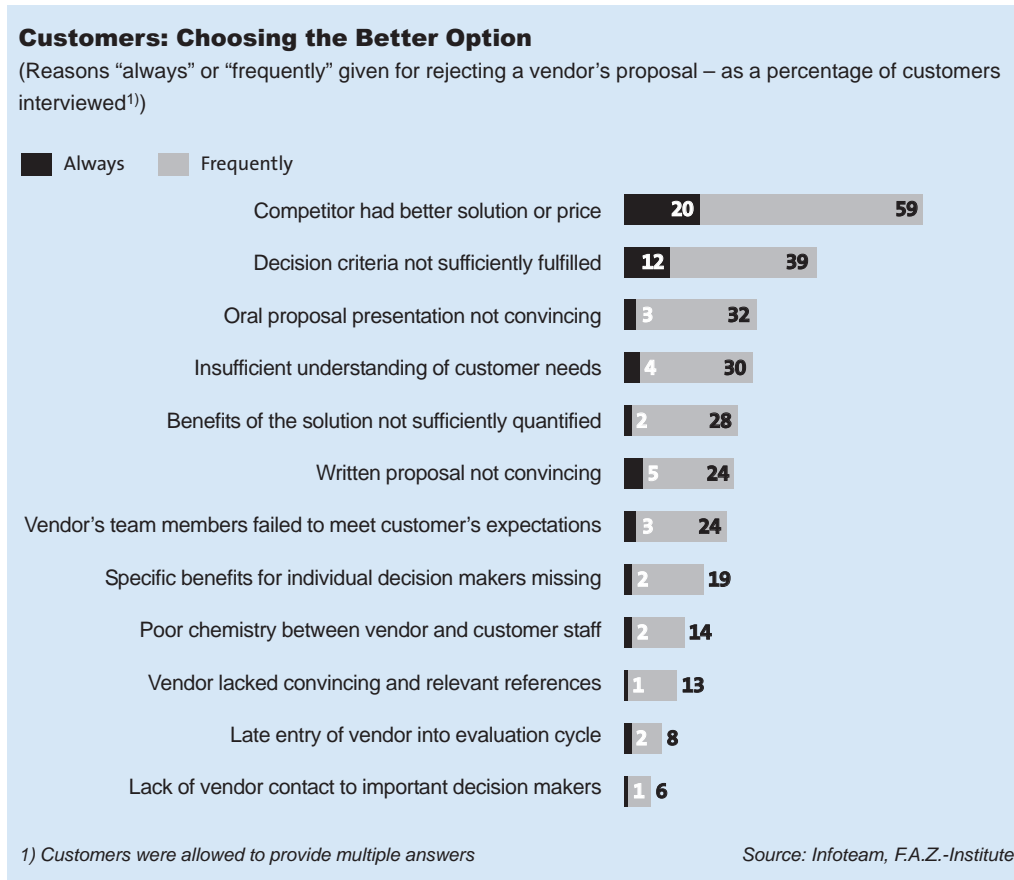
reason for losing. (see graphs on pages 27 and 28).

While vendors tend to focus a great deal of effort on their own offering and whether it meets the customer's requirements, the research clearly indicates they **should spend more time and effort to understand the strengths and weaknesses of other competitive solutions under evaluation.**

**The Most Frequent Reasons for Proposal Rejection**

Customer's Perspective	Vendor's Perspective
1 Competitor had better solution or price	1 Specific benefits for individual decision makers missing
2 Decision criteria not sufficiently fulfilled	2 Lack of vendor contact to important decision makers
3 Oral proposal presentation not convincing	3 Competitor had better solution or price
4 Insufficient understanding of customer needs	4 Late entry of vendor into evaluation cycle
5 Written proposal not convincing	5 Benefits of the solution not sufficiently quantified
6 Benefits of the solution not sufficiently quantified	6 Decision criteria not understood
7 Vendor's team members failed to meet customer's expectations	7 Vendor's team members failed to meet customer's expectations
8 Specific benefits for individual decision makers missing	8 Insufficient understanding of customer needs
9 Poor chemistry between vendor and customer staff	9 Poor chemistry between vendor and customer staff
10 Vendor lacked convincing and relevant references	10 Oral proposal presentation not convincing
11 Late entry of vendor into evaluation cycle	11 Vendor lacked convincing and relevant references
12 Lack of vendor contact to important decision makers	12 Written proposal not convincing

*Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.*



The second most common reason for proposal rejection, nearly thirty percent lower, at 51% of customers interviewed, is the vendor’s inability to fulfil the decision criteria. This result is hardly surprising, as 45% of vendors say they did not fully understand the decision criteria. Thus, **correctly identifying and potentially influencing the decision criteria should play a more important role in the vendor’s sales process.**

Customers say that the quality of a vendor’s written proposal and oral presentation has a strong influence on their decision – with 35% quoting this as a reason for rejection. The low level of satisfaction and areas for improvement were discussed in chapters 2.3 and 2.4. The majority of vendors, however, feel that the quality of their written proposals and oral presentations are only “sometimes” the reason for rejection – ranking only 10th and 12th.

One fifth of customers see the lack of articulated benefits for individual decision makers as a reason for proposal rejection. At first glance, this appears low, but if the interviews had been conducted with a group of people in customer organisations rather than just one individual, the outcome may well have been different.

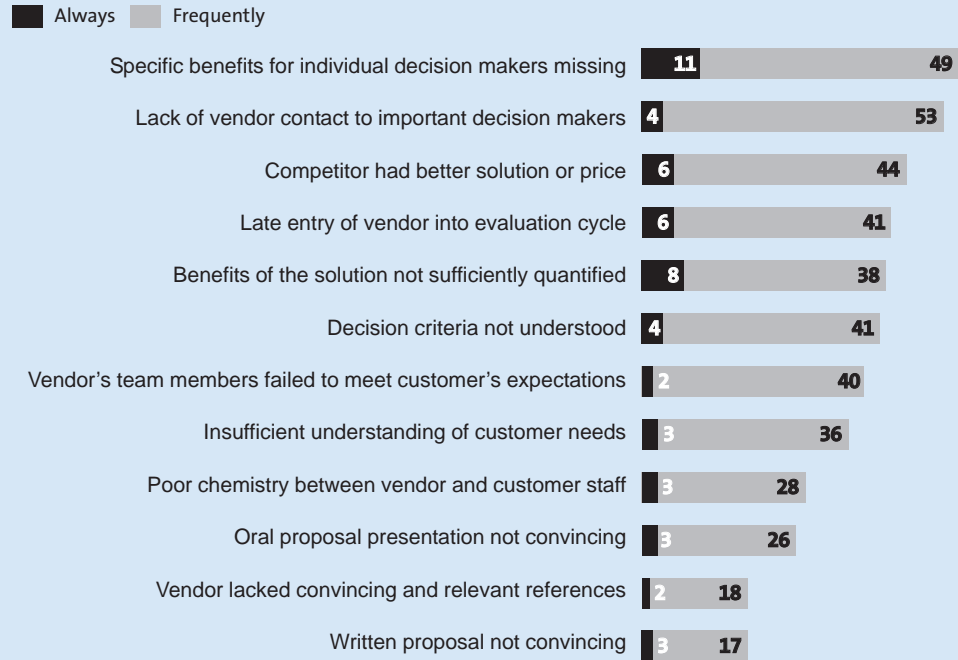
The size of the customer organisation interviewed plays a smaller role in the responses than originally anticipated. The expectation that large organisations place more emphasis on the presentation of benefits for individual decision makers is not supported by the results. In companies with less than 250 employees, the percentage of rejections based on the lack of benefits for individual decision makers is 32%, while for companies with more than 1.000 employees, it is just 23%.

From the vendors’ perspective the failure to articulate benefits for individual decision makers is the most frequently stated

*Customers say that the quality of a vendor’s written proposal and oral presentation has a strong influence on their decision.*

**Vendors: Relationship to Decision Makers is the Key to Success**

(Reasons “always” or “frequently” given for having a proposal rejected – as a percentage of vendors interviewed<sup>1)</sup>)



1) Vendors were allowed to provide multiple answers

Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

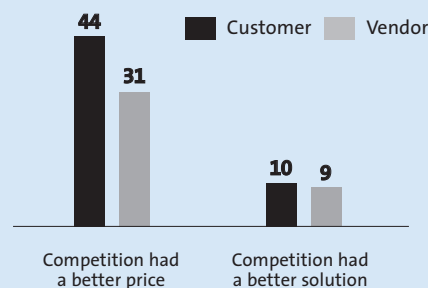
Vendors equate late entry into the sales process with competitive disadvantage as it limits the opportunity to gather valuable information.

reason for proposal rejection. 60% feel this is “always” or “frequently” the reason they lose. Close behind, at 57%, is the lack of contact to real decision makers. So, vendors understand the importance of developing and communicating value, their key issue is the lack of information due to insufficient contact with the right people.

Relationships with the right people are often an issue of timing – late entry into the customer's evaluation cycle is quoted by 47% of vendors as a reason for losing. For customers, this is hardly relevant, with only 10% saying it is important. Vendors equate late entry into the sales process with competitive disadvantage as it limits

**The Importance of Price**

(Other spontaneously provided reasons for rejecting a vendor's proposal – as a percentage of customers and vendors interviewed<sup>1)</sup>)



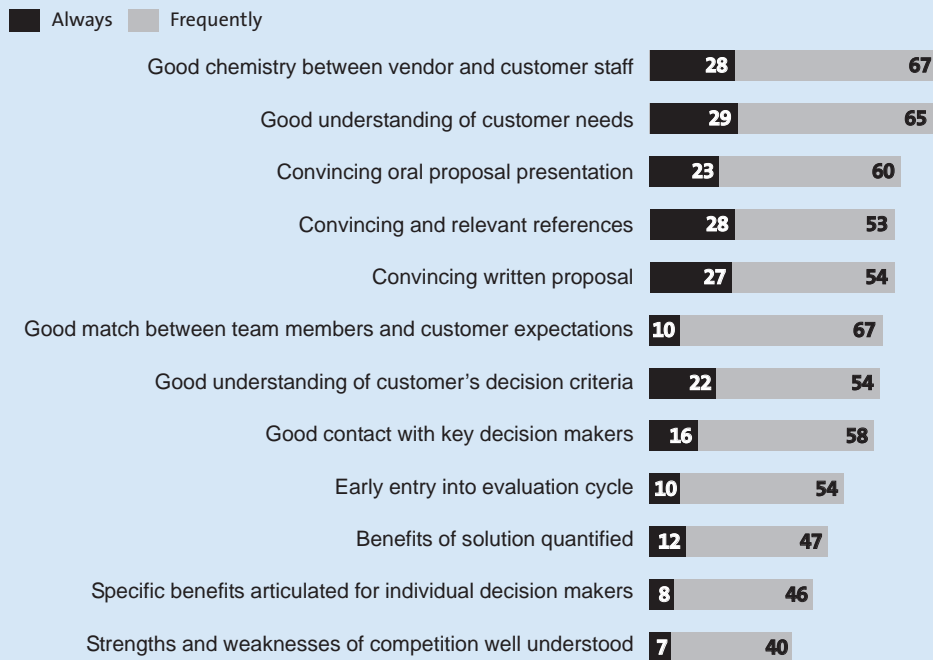
1) Customers and vendors were allowed to provide multiple answers

Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

What really makes a vendor's proposal attractive to the customer? Is it a question of product quality or price? In the end, both parties seem to agree that it's price. 44% of customers and 31% of vendors say that price is the most important decision criteria. When it comes to a better solution as the reason for proposal rejection, both customers and vendors say this is the reason in approximately 10% of cases.

### Vendors: Demonstrating Customer Understanding

(Reasons “always” or “frequently” given for winning – as a percentage of vendors interviewed<sup>1)</sup>)



<sup>1)</sup> Vendors were allowed to provide multiple answers

Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

the opportunity to gather valuable information about customer needs and to influence decision criteria.

“Why do we win?” vendors ask themselves. “Good chemistry” is what 95% say in response. What is surprising about this answer is that a factor effectively beyond the vendor’s control is rated higher than factors they can influence, such as understanding customer needs, proposal quality, presentation, and references.

Comparison of reasons for rejection and acceptance from the vendor’s perspective produces some important discrepancies. 31% of rejections are attributed to chemistry, compared to 95% of wins. High quality proposals, presentations and references are amongst the top 5 reasons vendors say they win, these same criteria rank just 10th, 11th, and 12th on the list of reasons for losing.

Vendors have a tendency to attribute success to their own good work, and rejections

to factors beyond their control. Given the evidence, the customer’s perception probably presents a more realistic representation of why vendors actually win and lose, as well as providing a list of areas for improvement. Factors that are important in the customer’s eyes such as vendor reliability and subject matter expertise are not even mentioned by vendors even when asked for other reasons for losing business.

## 4.2 Change of Suppliers – Quality and price decide

In a market where the number of vendors and solutions is increasing faster than the number of customers, a company can only grow at the expense of its competitors. Salespeople must acquire new business just to compensate for reduced revenues in existing accounts, let alone grow. Thus, just focusing on companies that are actively looking for new vendors is not sufficient; they must also pursue customers who are satisfied with their current suppliers.

## Supplied by; QuadS representing Infoteam in Southern Africa

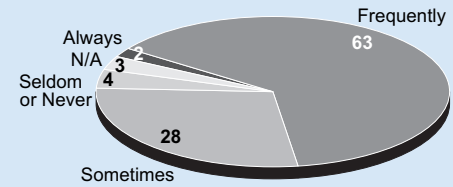
The majority of customers say they award contracts to their current suppliers. However, only 2% say this is “always” the case, leaving 98% as potential opportunities. **The number one reason customers feel motivated to move away from their existing supplier despite a longstanding relationship, is a superior solution offering from a new vendor.** Customers say solution quality is as important as price, but vendors seem to believe that price is much more frequently the reason for change. The interview results show that 60% of customers have, in the past, changed suppliers because a new vendor offered a better solution, not necessarily a cheaper one.

*Only 2% of customers say they “always” award contracts to existing suppliers, leaving 98% as potential opportunities.*

Both vendor (46%) and customer (49%) agree that a **change of supplier frequently happens because a new vendor is more actively engaged than the existing supplier, underlining the need for continuous, account management.** The competition, it appears, does not sleep, which is both a warning to existing suppliers, and an opportunity for new vendors. Existing suppliers cannot afford the luxury of just relaxing and relying on existing contacts. Customers want them to prove they still value their

### How Often Are New Contracts Awarded to Existing Suppliers

(As a percentage of customers interviewed)



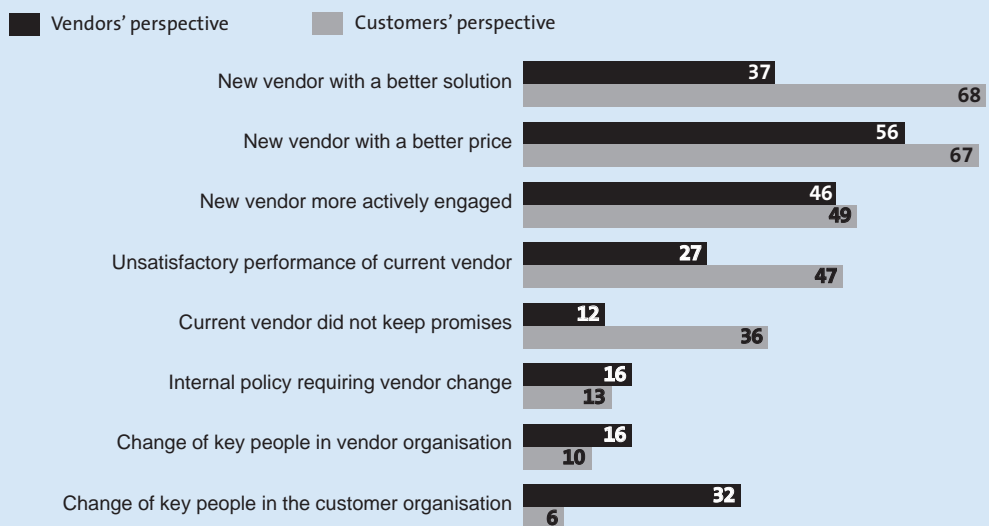
Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

business, and compete actively for every new opportunity.

47% of customers say that dissatisfaction with the performance of the current supplier is a frequent reason for change. In 36% of cases change is motivated by the current supplier not keeping their promises. These figures indicate that maintaining ongoing high performance and fulfilling contract expectations (see chapter 3) need more vendor attention. **Vendors seem to underestimate the importance of delivering the value promised during the sales process.** Only 12% of vendors admit that unfulfilled customer expectations are

### Replaced by the Competition

(Reasons “always” or “frequently” given for awarding a contract to a new vendor despite a longstanding business relationship – as a percentage of vendors and customers interviewed<sup>1)</sup>)



<sup>1)</sup> Vendors and customers were allowed to provide multiple answers

Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

frequently a reason for change, and only 27% consider customers dissatisfaction as a reason change. Customer responses paint a different picture.

From the vendors' perspective, changes of people in key roles in the customer organisation are a frequent cause of supplier change. Customers, however, are reluctant to admit that the departure of key staff is a reason for changing suppliers. This is most likely due to their unwillingness to admit that vendor choices are often based on personal relationships.

When asked what other reasons there are for changing suppliers, beyond the 8 choices provided, customers most frequently say that the reason is a new vendor's more up-to-date solution portfolio. So, existing suppliers must continually update their solution offering, and keep up with the market. **An up-to-date solution portfolio is on one hand a prerequisite for keeping existing customers and on the other, an entry point for new vendors if it is not done.**

### 4.3 The Learning Sales Organisation

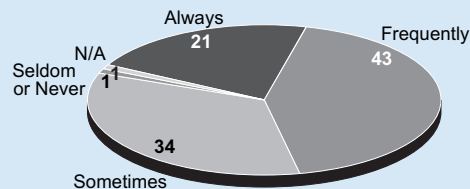
Learning from successes and failures is an integral process of successful organisations, using the results to improve the chances of winning current sales opportunities. **Unfortunately most vendors work hard to quickly forget lost sales opportunities – engraining the culture of not learning from mistakes.**

Vendors should not rely only on information provided by customers when analysing wins and losses. Customers typically provide “textbook” reasons such as price, solution, and competition. Rarely will a customer say that a vendor did not identify the real decision makers, failed to use customer language, or entered the evaluation process too late, missing important opportunities to understand customer needs.

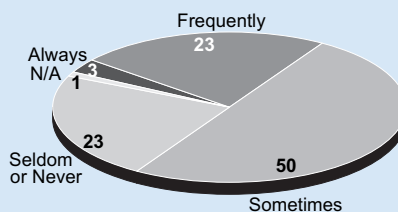
#### How Wins and Losses Are Analysed

(As a percentage of vendors interviewed)

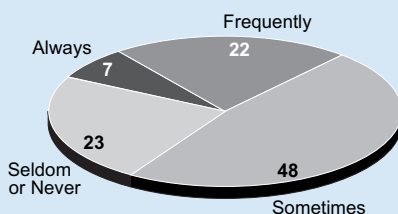
#### An internal briefing takes place with the opportunity team



#### A detailed customer feedback meeting takes place to identify sales process deficits



#### The learnings from win-loss analyses are used to develop sales best practices



Source: Infoteam, F.A.Z.-Institute.

Vendors that accept customer feedback at face value will continue to make the same mistakes over and over again. Critical self-analysis is necessary to really improve the quality of the sales process and performance. Every company should have a clearly defined procedure for analysing wins and losses.

## Supplied by; QuadS representing Infoteam in Southern Africa

*Vendors that accept customer feedback at face value will continue to make the same mistakes over and over again.*

64% of vendors say they “always” or “frequently” have an internal opportunity team debriefing following the customer’s decision, but, **only 7% use the learnings to develop best practices. The reintegration of learnings is a necessary step to prevent the repetition of mistakes.**

Customer interviews also provide a good opportunity to learn from mistakes, but are

not very common among vendors – only 3% say they always do it, and 23% admit they never do it. These interviews are very effective, but present the sales organisation with some challenges – who should conduct them, and how will the information be used? Used appropriately, this study could also provide sales organisations an opportunity to improve their learning practices.

# 5 Conclusions – Customer value as the foundation for corporate strategy

The key finding of this study is that **deficits in the B2B sales process strongly impact vendors' chances of success** and that mistakes which could easily be eliminated are frequently repeated. Most of the deficits uncovered stem from one common problem: customer value is not at the base of all activities throughout the sales process. From the customer's perspective, the question is not "How good is the solution?" but "What is the value of the solution to me and our company?"

Customer value should be the core of a vendor's strategy during the sales process, throughout contract fulfilment and account development. The value cycle begins when obtaining the first meeting, and at its end provides the basis for the generation of additional new business. But for many vendors, the cycle is broken at numerous points.

One key cause of breaks is in the recruitment of salespeople, where **vendors place too little emphasis on industry expertise**. Salespeople who cannot demonstrate industry knowledge have difficulty from the outset getting appointments with the right people. As the sales process continues, customers want vendors to focus on understanding their specific needs. Only someone who knows the customer's industry and incorporates their language into presentations gives the customer the feeling of having truly been understood.

Furthermore, the specific attributes of B2B selling are often overlooked. **The customer is a company, not an individual. Vendors who lack the skills to contact the real decision makers have difficulty tailoring their offering to meet the specific needs of each individual.** The result is the inability to effectively convey customer value. But problems are not just limited to the exter-

nal vendor-customer relationship; there are significant internal vendor issues as well. **The first of these is team selling. The numerous facets of customer requirements can only be met by a capable team that combines both industry and subject matter expertise.** A team lacking sufficient solution knowledge may make recommendations that cannot be implemented.

To avoid any discrepancy between the solution sold and the one delivered, information flow between departments must be improved. Salespeople must communicate the value propositions used in the sales process to the operations staff responsible for delivery. Operations staff must communicate the details of project success to salespeople who can use the realised customer value to generate additional business, and to target new prospects in the same industry. The study shows that bi-directional know-how transfer between sales and operations must become more systematic.

Improving sales performance requires the identification of sales process deficits and the incorporation of learnings from them in the organisation. Hopefully, this study will encourage you to critically examine your current sales practices, and improve performance through a program of continuous learning.

*Customer value should be the core of a vendor's strategy during the sales process, throughout contract fulfilment and account development.*

# Imprint

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*Publisher:* Infoteam Sales Process Consulting AG  
Geissbergstrasse 2  
CH-8302 Kloten-Zürich  
Switzerland  
Tel.: +41 44 804 11 77  
Fax: +41 44 804 11 70  
E-Mail: admin@infoteam-consulting.com  
www.infoteam-consulting.com

F.A.Z.-Institute for Management, Market  
and Media Information GmbH  
Mainzer Landstrasse 199  
60326 Frankfurt am Main  
Germany  
www.faz-institut.de

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*Editor:* Dr. Guido Birkner, Eric Czotscher,  
Kristina Merkner (F.A.Z.-Institute)

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