

Working Productively with SMART

by Nancy Knowlton

Many educators wonder about the best way to work with suppliers and how to choose products that will meet their own specific needs. Suppliers, on the other hand, know that the customer's needs must be met if there is to be a sale. Taking the time to think about how to work with each other is a good first step to a productive relationship.

At SMART we think about our customer interactions very deeply. We appreciate that many of our education customers did not start their working lives in their current roles – most often they moved through the teaching ranks to a technology role. Instead of having our customers wonder about how to do business with us, we would like to offer some tips about how to work with us and what to expect.



Be Direct

Tell us what you need and what is important to you. Armed with that information, we can address your specific questions and points of interest in presentations and meetings.

Your input could contribute to our product development plans. We take customers' questions and suggestions to heart when it comes to our products. We are always searching for ways to identify and meet your needs.

Ask Questions

Providing information and answering questions, sometimes a lot of them, are normal activities for us. While our end objective is to satisfy your needs by making a sale, we know that questions are part of your decision-making process. No supplier should take your questions and interest as a commitment to buy.

Approach us in a booth at a trade show, get a demo and ask all of your questions. Our people are trained to assist, and helping starts with listening to our customers. We bring a variety of people from various departments to shows – programmers, marketers and finance people – along with our sales team. All of our people will start from the same perspective – what do you need? We will work from there to ensure that your questions are answered.

Hold a Shoot Out

If you are considering products from multiple suppliers, make sure that you get the best possible information to

allow you to accurately position each company's offering. The Internet is a great place to start, but it is not as information-intensive an experience as a direct exchange.

A shoot out, or competitive demo between two or more suppliers, is the best way to see, evaluate and compare products in action. To make the most of a shoot out, set out the parameters that are important to you and ask suppliers to address them. An organized evaluation process will greatly simplify the overall selection process and ensure that your ultimate choice is based on objective, defensible factors.

We are used to these comparative processes and will work with you to ensure that we put our best foot forward and support a robust selection process.

Get the Facts

There are external, independent sources of information that can support claims around category share. For example, Futuresource collects data from a variety of sources by country and can validate the information that we share with you about our market position. Don't just take our word for it – confirm it with the professionals who track markets for a living.

Check with our Customers

Our customers know we deliver not just through the sales process but also post-sale. They can talk to you about how our products perform and how easily teachers and students get up the learning curve. It's one thing for us to claim that our products are good, and it's another for you to hear it from a customer who has worked with us.

Continue to Engage

Buying from us is not a one-time activity. With upgrades and new products routinely available, it pays to check in regularly to understand our product roadmap and everything that we do to support our customers beyond simply providing the product.

The Bottom Line

We look at selling as a process that helps people get what they need and want. It is a cordial and painless exchange of information, with parties dealing with each other in a direct and honest fashion.

Making the sale is the start of the relationship for us – not the end.

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