

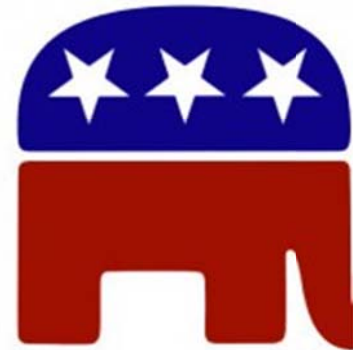


The Politics of Selling: How to Win Votes and Sales

by [Nancy Pekala](#)

As the 2012 Republican primary gets red hot, each candidate is busy crafting and refining his sales strategy in order to win more votes in the final stretch. The current primary offers B2B marketers intriguing lessons in the politics of selling that they can apply within their own sales organizations.

In an exclusive interview with [B2B Marketing](#), Tim Riesterer, Chief Strategy and Marketing Officer of Corporate Visions, Inc., and author of “Customer Message Management” and [“Conversations That Win the Complex Sale”](#) shared his insights about how B2B marketers can take a sales cue from presidential candidate campaign strategies. What follows is an excerpt of the interview (listen to the podcast interview [here](#).)



B2B Marketing: *The current Republican Primary offers marketers intriguing examples of how candidates are using a variety of social and marketing strategies to win votes. To start off, can you assess from a marketing perspective how the top candidates are faring?*

Tim Riesterer: Watching the top candidates in this race is a little like watching the stock market or riding a roller coaster. As a marketer, you would like to see a little more consistent performance from your product if one of these candidates was your product. Certainly, it's been a bit jarring to actually see how quickly things can swing when you're used to seeing things move on a much slower slope or trajectory. I think what's happening is you're seeing a lot of strategy having to shift quickly, adapt quickly, bob and dodge and weave because there is so much volatility right now. From a marketer's perspective, it's actually quite interesting.

B2B Marketing: *You've indicated that comparisons can be made between how the current candidates are working to overcome voters' indecision with that of marketers and sales professionals' goals of obtaining engagement and conversions. Can you elaborate on that?*

Riesterer: One of the reasons for the current volatility is that people are very indecisive. They just don't know which way to go on their candidate of choice. It's not just because voters don't understand the issues. I think they do. They're just struggling to figure out how they can pin down one candidate that makes the most sense to what matters to them.

When you take a look at brain science as it relates to making decisions, the strongest motivator for making a decision of any type is which decision is going to help insure your survival. People

are more motivated to move away from some risk or potential loss that could impact their survival versus moving toward something that looks like spectacular gain. We're just wired that way. It happens like that in sales cycles as well.

Indecision and the inability to choose to do something new or different is your biggest enemy. It's difficult to get somebody to change. In order to get people to make a decision to move in a different direction, you have to help them see their current situation as unsafe. Before they're ready to choose a new safe, they have to believe where they currently are is unsafe. That's the thing about the status quo. They believe they are safe when they're there. So, you have to start creating opportunities as a salesperson and start converting opportunities by convincing someone they need to change and they need to do it now before you can really start convincing them that you are that best choice. You need to get prospects to answer "yes" to three questions---Why change? Why you? Why now? Candidates are in the same place. They have to convince constituents that the candidate they think they want to choose is not the person they should choose and then move them to make a decision to choose differently.

B2B Marketing: *Which candidates are the best salespersons and marketers?*

Riesterer: Normally, political candidates can shape and frame almost an entire presence through advertising and other media types of appearances that are much more controlled and contrived. The current use of political debate forums has really exposed all of the candidates for who they really, what they represent and how well they represent it. We've seen a lot of candidates fall by the wayside that could probably have produced some excellent speeches, some excellent media opportunities and some great advertising but poor performance in these debates really changed the game. What you're seeing today is that those with the deeper intellect, grasp of the issues and ability to be articulate in spontaneous as well as controlled moments have risen to the top.

We all say, 'I only want positive ads; I don't want negative ads.' But the fact is that the human brain and voters actually need negative advertising in order to help frame their decision. They have to know what they need to move away from before they figure out what they want to move toward."

B2B Marketing: *What specific techniques being used by today's presidential candidates can salespeople and marketers adopt in their work?*

Riesterer: The fact is that the human brain and voters actually need negative advertising in order to help frame their decision. They have to know what they need to move away from before they figure out what they want to move toward. We all say, 'I only want positive ads; I don't want negative ads.' That's because the part of our brain that's communicating that is where language resides and the part of our brain where decisions take place has no language. So we do really respond to the negative ads that help us decide what not to do and what to move away from before we decide what to move toward.

This same exact scenario occurs in sales situations. You have to be provocative. You have to say something that startles the status quo. An object that is at rest tends to remain at rest until you put another force against it. Usually, you have to loosen up the status quo by pointing out where the rain clouds reside. You tell them where the floorboards they're standing on are beginning to leak and squeak not because they made a bad decision but because of new trends, issues, risks, or missed opportunities since the last time they made that decision. You need to shed light on what has changed, explain the potential impact of not moving in a new

direction and speak to the strengths of your solution. Currently, we tend to go in guns blazing. Instead of leading with your solution, you have to lead *to* your solution.

B2B Marketing: *What do you believe salespeople and marketers most often get wrong when attempting to motivate prospects?*



Riesterer: Companies at their very core want to present a face to the market that says it's all going to be butterfly wings and pixie dust when you work with us. It's all going to be good, good, good. Salespeople don't want to rock any boats. They want customers to like them so they talk about all the good, good, good things that are going to happen. Yet, customers are stuck. What salespeople fail to realize is that people don't get fired for missing out on a good opportunity that nobody really knew about. They do get fired for missing out on a risk or a challenge or a threat that caused a problem in the company. So they're stuck thinking, 'Should I take a chance and go for all this goodness and risk of change?' They struggle. They become indecisive. Salespeople have not really understood that feature benefit selling, leading with your differentiation before the customer knows if they need to or want to do anything different is completely usurping the buying process that goes on in buyers' brains. They're getting too far ahead of where the customer is really at. That's why we see 60% of so-called qualified leads falling out due to no decision or status quo. That means the majority—6 out of 10—leads in a sales pipeline leave because they didn't do anything which means salespeople are only battling for the 4 that are ready. That's not enough to grow your company. You've got to figure out a way to get 1 or 2 out of those 6 leads to risk change if you really want to grow at the rate you're being charged with growing.

B2B Marketing: *What needs to change in the sales process itself to move the needle towards better conversions, sales and lead generation?*

Riesterer: Companies have to identify and determine what their distinct point of view on the marketplace is as opposed to going in and saying, 'Hey, let's ask these 20 questions and try to discover where the customer has pain.' A person with the status quo might tell you where they have some pain but they're not going to tell you big enough pain that's going to cause them to actually change. In their mind, the pain of change is actually bigger than the pains they're living with. So a company has to develop a distinct point of view that says, 'Based on our experience of serving dozens if not hundreds of people who look just like you, we're seeing these issues affecting where companies are at today.' Companies realize they can't stay the same and must try to do things differently. This idea of launching a point of view into the customer conversation involves leading with how you've helped other companies solve similar issues rather than educating them on product features. You have to help the pains they're living with look bigger than the pain of changing to a new solution and that's the complete miss that's happening with salespeople today.

[Nancy Pekala](#) is the AMA's Senior Director of Online Content and editor of [B2B Marketing](#). Continue the conversation about B2B sales strategy in the B2B Marketing group of [AMACONnect](#), the AMA's online community specifically for marketers. Follow us on Twitter @[marketing_power](#).