5 Ways to Keep Moving Ahead After a Rejected Pitch

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You identified the perfect client for your service. You created a stellar presentation with specific examples of how your company is qualified to address the client's needs. You practiced your pitch and you're confident. You nailed the presentation.

And after all of that they said "no." You're crushed. You're left questioning your career choice and your abilities.

If you're in a sales position and it hasn't happened to you yet, it will. What do you do now?

Before you write that prospective client off, you still have some critical work to do. It's easy to dwell on the negative experience and walk away, but you may be leaving a future deal on the table. And you might learn something essential if you're bold enough to ask some follow-up questions.

Here are five ways to stay positive and moving forward despite a rejection:

1. Ask for feedback.

It’s hard to do, but it won’t hurt. Ask why they made the decision to go with another firm or to walk away from the deal.

When you ask for constructive criticism, you might be surprised by what you hear, and you might get more insight into how they made the decision.

Reflect on the criticism and practice scenarios that make use of the suggestions. Use their responses to make future changes. Maybe you’ll realize this prospect wasn’t an excellent prospect to begin with. Every rejection can help you better establish who your ideal client is, and from there, the best way to close the deal.

Accepting constructive criticism with an open mind takes practice. Listen carefully (and quietly!) and take notes. Thank the prospect respectfully.

2. Follow up.

Follow-ups are part of the game. Only two percent of deals are closed within the first meeting and, on average, it takes five contact attempts to get a “yes.” That doesn’t mean you should bombard your point of contact. Check in periodically so you’re on their mind.

There are many reasons people say no, and it’s likely the answer isn’t personal. Maybe your service or prospect isn’t going to be approved in this year’s budget. Start planning ahead: establish when their budget year begins, and more importantly, when they submit budget items so that you can reach out beforehand with an updated proposal.

Get a sense of what they want to see in a proposal. Sometimes it pays to be broad while other times it’s best to be more

specific. Perhaps they weren’t ready for your broad proposal and you can present a pared-down version at a later time.

Remember, it’s OK to start with a smaller buy because you can add services and items as you gain trust. Those 98 percent who said “no” on the first meeting value trust nearly as much as they value the service you provide. Build that relationship and you will be on their mind as soon as they have a need for what you offer.

3. Keep in touch professionally.

Show your contact you value them as a professional connection and thought leader in their industry. These are a few simple things you can do to show you care:

- Connect on LinkedIn: This is a simple way to show you’re interested in their career. A simple “like” or comment can go a long way.
- Ask if they’d like to be added to your mailing list: This is a great way to keep them up to date on news and show you’re thinking of them when you send out holiday cards.
- Send an article: Read an article about a similar successful business in another market? Send it along with a quick email and mention you thought they’d find it insightful.

When a buyer feels a connection, they are 60 percent more likely to pay for your services. These efforts help enhance your company’s services and skills, and your potential client will get to know your business better from afar. You give them time to learn how your service or product makes sense for their business without the pressure that accompanies active prospecting.

4. Ask for referrals.

Perhaps you're not exactly their cup of tea, but maybe their college roommate who owns a business could use your service. Tell them you believe in your service or product and you'd love the opportunity to discuss it with someone they consider a good prospect. Direct communication can be intimidating, but it will help you reach your goals or get close to them.

If you're uncomfortable with making this ask, offer an incentive for referrals—it'll make the gesture attractive, and it's more likely your prospective client will remember to refer you.

Follow-up with marketing materials your prospective client can send to their colleagues if they're asked for a referral. And don't forget to always include contact information in your email signature so you're easy to find in their contacts.

You can even encourage referrals passively by offering personal referral links on your website, tangible referral cards, or networking through Facebook Groups or Meetup.

You've asked the questions and taken notes. What's next?

5. Consider passing the prospect onto another rep.

You're in sales, so you're competitive, but you might not be the right personality fit for this client. Your boss wants the business and you'll get a pat on the back even if someone else closes it.

Doing so, the potential client might view you as a valuable resource, and by offering up connections, you position yourself as someone who is easy to work with and does not take things too personally.

The entire team benefits from new clients. No matter who secured it, a broad base of business extends the company’s recognition, and that will create more leads for all.

Talk to a trusted mentor and remember it’s OK. Have coffee with a mentor or friend and ask them to give you some honest feedback. You should already be doing this regularly, so this is the perfect opportunity to seek advice about your approach.

Ask them what sales techniques work best in their industry. How do they keep hustling when they get a rejection?

It’s really tough to hold your head up when you have quotas to meet and need commissions to pay bills. You did your best and they made a business decision that likely has nothing to do with you personally. Use this as an opportunity to reflect, make necessary changes, and grow.

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