

# 7 Stages of the Sales Cycle:

How to Master Each Step to Capture More Business



# The Sales Journey Is Evolving

B2B sales are more competitive than ever. Advertisers looking for effective, affordable solutions have many options besides yours. What's more, analog is increasingly giving way to digital — not just with advertising itself, but with prospecting, pitching and closing deals.

The sales teams evolving with these changes are the ones winning more deals. Are you ready to evolve, take on today's challenges and opportunities, and close more business?

In this e-book, we'll cover the seven stages of the sales cycle, from prospecting and qualifying to overcoming objections and closing deals. We'll give you tips for how to move from each stage to the next, so you can boost your close rates and amplify revenue.



In the e-book, we'll review:

- 1 Prospecting:**  
Do's, don'ts and expert advice
- 2 Making contact:**  
Four tips to do it well
- 3 Qualifying compatibility:**  
Four ways to ensure alignment
- 4 Analyzing prospect needs:**  
10 best practices for salespeople
- 5 Presenting your solution:**  
Strategies for developing winning proposals
- 6 Overcoming objections:**  
How to get the yes
- 7 Closing the sale:**  
Instill confidence to book the business

# The State of Broadcast Sales and the Rise of Digital



## Expert Advice

“Digital has transitioned from the shiny toy to the standard. When the industry first leaned into digital, most of our conversations with clients were explaining to them why it is important to have digital included in the marketing plan. Now, the conversation is more about why our digital vs. other digital pitches.”

Greg Beran  
Beasley Media Wilmington

**32%** of local advertisers are buying their digital ads from a radio seller. [\(Source\)](#)

**\$1.8B**

in digital sales was generated by radio stations last year, an increase of 21% over the year before. [\(Source\)](#)

Up to **35%**

better ROI is possible when businesses use multiple advertising channels vs. just a single channel. [\(Source\)](#)

**4 out of 5**

small businesses say that digital advertising helps them compete with bigger businesses. [\(Source\)](#)

**40** per month:

the estimated number of advertising proposals a typical local business is inundated with today [\(Source\)](#)

Stage 1:  
Prospecting





## Stage 1

# Prospecting

## Are you and your prospect compatible?

It seems like a simple question, but the answer is complicated. That's why finding out your prospect's compatibility with what you're looking for in a lead is crucial. Take note of the do's and don'ts of the vetting process.

- ❌ **Don't: Go After Every Opportunity**
- ✅ **Do: Identify the Best Fit and Use of Time**

Evaluate your prospect's likelihood of becoming a customer. To do this, you must determine if they are viable. One approach to qualification is BANT (budget, authority, need and timeline):

- Do they have the **budget** for your solution?
- Does the lead have the **authority** to make a decision?
- Is there a genuine **need** for your product?
- Can you deliver within the prospect's **timeline**?

By answering these questions, you can identify the most viable opportunities. This evaluation allows you to put the right amount of time and resources toward certain prospects over others.



### Expert Advice

"I start by thinking about our key customer profile and searching for prospects that are well-aligned. I ask myself, 'Is this a prospect that I want to spend my time with, and can I truly make a difference for them?'"

Todd Kalman  
SVP of Sales, Marketron



# Prospecting

❌ **Don't: Prospect Companies with Red Flags**

✅ **Do: Create an Ideal Client Profile**

Not every prospect is worthy of your time and investment. Develop and define your ideal client profile. Then, determine the “make” and “break” factors that are good predictors of a successful relationship.

Creating your ideal client profile requires research of the industry, current [digital marketing trends](#) and other factors. Once you've constructed this, qualify your leads based on these criteria, and eliminate any that miss the cut. Focus your energy and time on the remaining list. In most industries, the key client profile will offer a “target-rich” environment of quality leads.



## Expert Advice

“We can't assume that a business owner wants (or needs) to grow. Many are content with the status quo. Figure out as much about the right potential prospect for you as possible beforehand. Discover what makes them tick, what defines success for them, and from there, you'll know what solution is ideal for their needs.”

Jeff Ulrich  
Senior Manager of Digital Transformation, Marketron



## Not Every Interested Party Is Worth Prospecting

A prospect might demonstrate interest in your services, but this doesn't automatically make the prospect worthy of a proposal, pitch, estimate or conversation. Similarly, some business owners are content with what they're doing and aren't prepared to handle any change or surge in business.

Show genuine interest in your prospects so they show interest in you. Interest aside, respecting your prospects and their needs is vital. You should do the same for your time and efforts. Properly vetting leads up front can put you in the best position for success.

Stage 1:  
Prospecting



Stage 2:  
Making Contact



## Stage 2

# Making Contact

**After you vet your prospect and determine that they fit your ideal customer profile, it's time to initiate contact.**

It's a good practice to assume nothing about your prospects. Do your homework up front, and perform as much [research](#) as possible. That should include getting to know the business and how they advertise, as well as looking back at previous engagements between the advertiser and your organization.

Then, ask crucial qualifying questions. Don't move too quickly, though, or you could make your prospects uncomfortable.

Doing this is a delicate balance, so be an active listener and give the person your full attention. Here are some questions you can consider when you make contact.

## The Best Questions to Ask to Determine if the Lead Is Sales-Ready

- What do you **look** for when buying advertising solutions?
- What are your company **goals** or revenue goals?
- What is your business **struggling with** today?
- What internal **resources** do you have to apply to advertising?
- What's the **most important thing** you want consumers to know about you?
- What makes you **lose sleep** at night?





# Making Contact



## Expert Advice

“My goal is to uncover their pain points by asking the right questions and truly listening to their answers to break down the walls that some prospects build up. From there, search for two solid areas of need. Once you designate those areas, you can create a solution and deliver real results.

Karen Martinelli  
Digital Sales and Marketing  
Manager, Today Media

Keep in mind that they likely receive inquiries regularly regarding advertising. So, what will you do to stand out and add value to their business? Consider these tips:

## Build Rapport by Understanding the Advertiser

To connect with a customer, you need to understand them. First, you must be knowledgeable of their business and customer base. You have access to data about their industry, consumer behavior trends and other nuggets they'd find useful. In conversation, you could include research-based points such as:



News or current events that relate to their industry and its outlook for the future



Results regarding different advertising vehicles (digital, email, radio, TV, etc.)



Data about their potential customers and what they need

Second, you'll cultivate rapport better if you know more about the person or people making decisions. You can use tools like [Crystal Knows](#) to gather insights on the person using their LinkedIn profile. Simply searching for them online could also reveal more about their professional life, such as interests and recognition. Weaving this into an initial conversation could enhance your credibility.



# Making Contact

## Script an Engaging Elevator Pitch

An elevator pitch is what your company does and how it benefits its customers. It should be unique and relevant to your prospect. Crafting one that defines your story and vision for the advertiser should create excitement and anticipation.

Here are some tips for an engaging elevator pitch to use when you make contact:



**Capture one selling point:** Instead of attempting to include anything and everything your business does, dial in what matters to your specific audience. Why should they care, and how will it benefit them?



**Keep it casual:** Remember that this is a friendly conversation. You're approaching it with a consultative method. You're helping, not selling. Give it a relaxed feel so it's something you can naturally bring up in conversation. Practice until it feels effortless.



**Be short and sweet:** Confusing and long elevator pitches are the ones people forget, so make it something you can remember. Your prospect won't forget a short, direct message.



### Expert Advice

"The goal of the pitch is to get your listener interested enough to commit to a meeting. Practice is key to nail an elevator pitch."

**Jeff Ulrich**  
Senior Manager of Digital  
Transformation, Marketron

# Making Contact

## Communicate Effectively

Sales pros know that communication is everything. The wrong tone, mood or direction of the conversation can make or break your next step. Before jumping in, ensure you understand your prospect's persona, as they each have different goals and priorities.

Try these suggestions for better communication:



**Find your voice:** Put in the time and effort to discover your tone and style. You're building a bridge, which starts with an authentic connection.



**Practice active listening:** Hear and make notes of what they want, expect and need. When it's your time to talk, focus on their concerns. Doing so establishes you as a trusted resource.



**Use feedback loops:** Quick follow-up questions throughout your conversations help to build deeper connections. If you're explaining a tactic, confirm that they understand with questions like "Does that make sense?" or "Would that work for you?"



### Expert Advice

"Aim to come across as someone who offers value. Be specific and deliberate with your prospecting. Let the prospect know why you chose to reach out to them."

**Todd Kalman**  
SVP of Sales, Marketron

# Making Contact

## Master the Follow-Up

Generic follow-ups won't cut through the noise. Rather, you'll need to personalize these to resonate with prospects.



**Humanize yourself:** Always leave a voicemail so prospects can put a voice to a name. Doing so adds a human element to your relationship.



**Personalize communications:** Keep it simple and authentic in your follow-ups, so your prospect feels heard and not on the receiving end of a templated email or scripted voicemail.



**Establish what's next:** The overall goal is to keep your conversations moving. Instead of leaving the conversation open-ended, set a date and time to chat.

When you build rapport naturally, it creates opportunity, trust and connection. By showing that you're genuinely interested in your prospect, you lay a solid foundation for a relationship to bloom. Ask questions, truly listen, be human, and put your prospect first. Over time, these tactics will help you build relationships.



## Stage 1: Prospecting



## Stage 2: Making Contact

## Stage 3: Qualifying Compatibility

A man with grey hair, wearing a blue button-down shirt over a white t-shirt, is looking down and writing on a notepad with a blue pen. The notepad has some colorful markings on it.

### Stage 3

# Qualifying Compatibility

**After you make contact and schedule a meeting, the next stage is to qualify compatibility.**

This step can often get less attention than it deserves. That's because it requires a commitment of time and training to execute it well.

The overall goal of this step is to evaluate and qualify your prospect's needs and [objections](#). Essentially, what do they want for their business? Can your solution help them get it?

You'll want to start with a customer needs assessment (CNA), which is the act of identifying what motivates your prospects. What makes them buy advertising solutions? What's important to them when working with a media company?

**In qualifications, you need to define the business need and probable objections.**

- **A prospect's business need:** What salespeople must identify to provide value and move them further along in the sales cycle
- **A prospect's objection:** A challenge that may lead the prospect to oppose a product, service or solution

Before anything else, identify and clearly define the prospect's main business need. Ask these questions:

- What's driving your biggest problem?
- What does a viable solution look like?
- How do you define ROI?



# Qualifying Compatibility

## Craft Meaningful Questions Up Front



Teach yourself as much as possible about your prospect's business before contacting them, so you can confidently suggest your solution as the answer. This all starts with doing your homework. Research can pay dividends if you do it well.

Start by jotting down a [list of questions](#). You have minimal time to assess the customers, so use it wisely. Meaningful questions should focus on goals, tactics, challenges and what success looks like.



### Expert Advice

"Do your homework as if you were thinking of investing in the company yourself. After all, you are likely to be asking them to invest in yours."

**Jeff Ulrich**  
Senior Manager of Digital Transformation, Marketron

## Listen. Listen. Listen.



One of the essential skills of a salesperson is being an active listener. You're asking questions that help you build out the best plan for that advertiser. They'll be doing much more talking than you, so it's crucial to stay focused.

Normalize going down the rabbit hole to help your prospects identify pain points. If you ask a question and the conversation goes on a tangent, embrace it. A perk of creating a comprehensive needs analysis is that you obtain specifics and details usually known only by individuals at the business. When you have access to that information, you can craft a proposal that addresses both needs and opportunities; otherwise, you're simply guessing.



### Expert Advice

"Before going into a prospect call, I ask myself, 'What are the client's goals?' Make it all about them — not about you — and truly listen."

**Karen Martinelli**  
Digital Sales and Marketing Manager, Today Media

Stage 1:  
Prospecting

Stage 2:  
Making Contact

Stage 3:  
Qualifying  
Compatibility

Stage 4:  
Analyzing Prospect Needs





## Stage 4

# Analyzing Prospect Needs

**The fourth stage is to analyze prospect needs.**

You'll need to address those with a personalized solution. You've already completed your CNA, which will be pivotal in the proposal and closing process. It also plays a role in campaign implementation, performance metrics and obtaining renewals.

## Ask for Support

Analyzing prospect needs is arguably the hardest step in the sales process. Consider leaning into support whenever you need it. Many sellers need guidance to uncover the right information.



Analyzing prospect needs can be very industry specific, meaning that proper training and support are even more essential. Ask your peers questions, seek advice whenever you can, and don't be afraid to make mistakes. In the end, it will lead to more successful analyses and proposals — and real results.

# Analyzing Prospect Needs

## Ensure the Proposal Addresses Prospect Needs

These tips will be crucial in delivering a compelling proposal an organization simply cannot refuse:



01

### Restate the need.

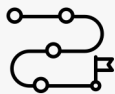
You listened and learned from your prospect. Now, prove it. Reiterate what you heard to catch their attention from moment one. Hooking them up front will make them ready to dive into the rest of the conversation.



02

### Introduce your concept.

This is your big “aha!” moment. Focus on how your solutions will address the prospect’s specific needs. This shouldn’t be a generalization of how great your products are or broad stats.



03

### Summarize the action plan.

Bullet each step you plan to take with your proposal. From research and internal meetings to a campaign kickoff and implementation, easily show them what the process will look like, so they know what to expect.



04

### Spell out the investment.

Itemize each cost; that way, if your prospect can’t afford the whole package, you can break it down into something more manageable. Make sure you are transparent with the costs you include.



05

### Always be confirming (ABC).

While you’re going through your proposal, ask if certain points make sense along the way. This helps keep the process moving, freeing up time to discuss the future rather than going back through to reexplain a line item or answer a question.

# Analyzing Prospect Needs



06

## Create an appendix.

A proposal can be lengthy with details. Keep the solution the focus of your conversation, but don't hesitate to include other highlights in an appendix.



07

## Include proof points.

An example of something perfect for an appendix is a success story or testimonials. Share similar client successes to set expectations up front. They'll also get a clear picture of what it's like to work with you.



08

## Specify a call to action.

What do you want your prospect to do once you get to the end of your proposal? Make it specific: "Let's get started" or "What do you need from me?" Additionally, learn how to read a prospect if they aren't responding to you. You don't want to waste time on a prospect that checks out.



09

## Prove you listened.

You learned about your prospect's business before contacting them. You also asked them questions during the process to ensure you didn't miss anything. Illustrate this with confidence.



10

## Review and proofread your proposal.

Typos, wrong company names, missing sections and more can all derail your prospect's attention during a crucial conversation. Ask a colleague to be a second set of eyes. You can also use tools like Grammarly to check grammar and spelling.

# Analyzing Prospect Needs

## Connect the Dots to Your Solution

Your proposal to the advertiser should align with their business needs. If it doesn't, it will fall flat. You've researched the company, considered industry trends and asked lots of questions. Now, you need to gather this intelligence to connect the dots between their challenges and your solutions.



### Expert Advice

"Do not steer the prospect to best fit your solution. This is a common error, which you know you've made if you go to close a deal and the prospect pushes back because they are uncertain as to whether your solution will work for them."

Todd Kalman  
SVP of Sales, Marketron



## Analyze Prospect Needs for Better Results

Understanding the scope of prospect needs is critical to moving the sales process along. It also shows a commitment by you to your advertisers. You aren't throwing cookie-cutter options around. Instead, you tailor them to that specific customer.



Stage 1:  
Prospecting

Stage 2:  
Making Contact

Stage 3:  
Qualifying  
Compatibility

Stage 4:  
Analyzing Prospect Needs

Stage 5:  
Presenting Your Solution



A man with a beard, wearing a blue button-down shirt, stands and presents to a woman seated at a table. He holds a spiral notebook and gestures with his right hand. The woman is partially visible in the foreground, looking down at a pink notebook on the table. The setting is a modern office with white walls and a laptop on the table.

## Stage 5

# Presenting Your Solution

**We've made it to the fifth stage of the sales cycle: presenting your solution.**

You did the research, analyzed their needs and developed a targeted proposal. It's now time to master presenting your solution and connecting it to their goals.

You'll want to have a deep understanding of the solution, convey how it addresses needs, and ensure that no questions linger. Your role is consultative. You aren't selling; you're helping!

To better prepare yourself to present your solution, check out these words of wisdom from experts in the field.

## Advice for Presenting Your Solution

Get creative to tell a story.



### Expert Advice

"The main ingredients of the story: the problem, the strategy to resolve the problem, the tools you will use to fix the problem, and how you will follow up. Add some creativity to ice the cake. If your proposal has the right ingredients, it will be hard for the client to say no."

**Karen Martinelli**  
Digital Sales and Marketing Manager, Today Media

# Presenting Your Solution

Start with ROI.



## Expert Advice

"Your proposal should look like a business plan, not a grid of spots and rates. Do the math for ROI before your meeting, so you have the answers before you present your solution."

Jeff Ulrich  
Senior Manager of Digital Transformation, Marketron

Offer different options.



## Expert Advice

"Include two or three different options on the first page. This could look like high-level bullet points, and the following pages go into more detail. This often gives them the perception that they are in control of what they're buying and gives them a frame of reference if they want to go higher or lower with their budget."

Lauren Pettus  
Digital Sales Manager, Today, Inc.



# Presenting Your Solution

Use available tools.



## Expert Advice

"A winning story takes time to create. We have tools at our fingertips to help put together something strong, like the Pitch proposal builder as well as PowerPoint and/or Google slides."

Karen Martinelli  
Digital Sales and Marketing Manager, Today Media

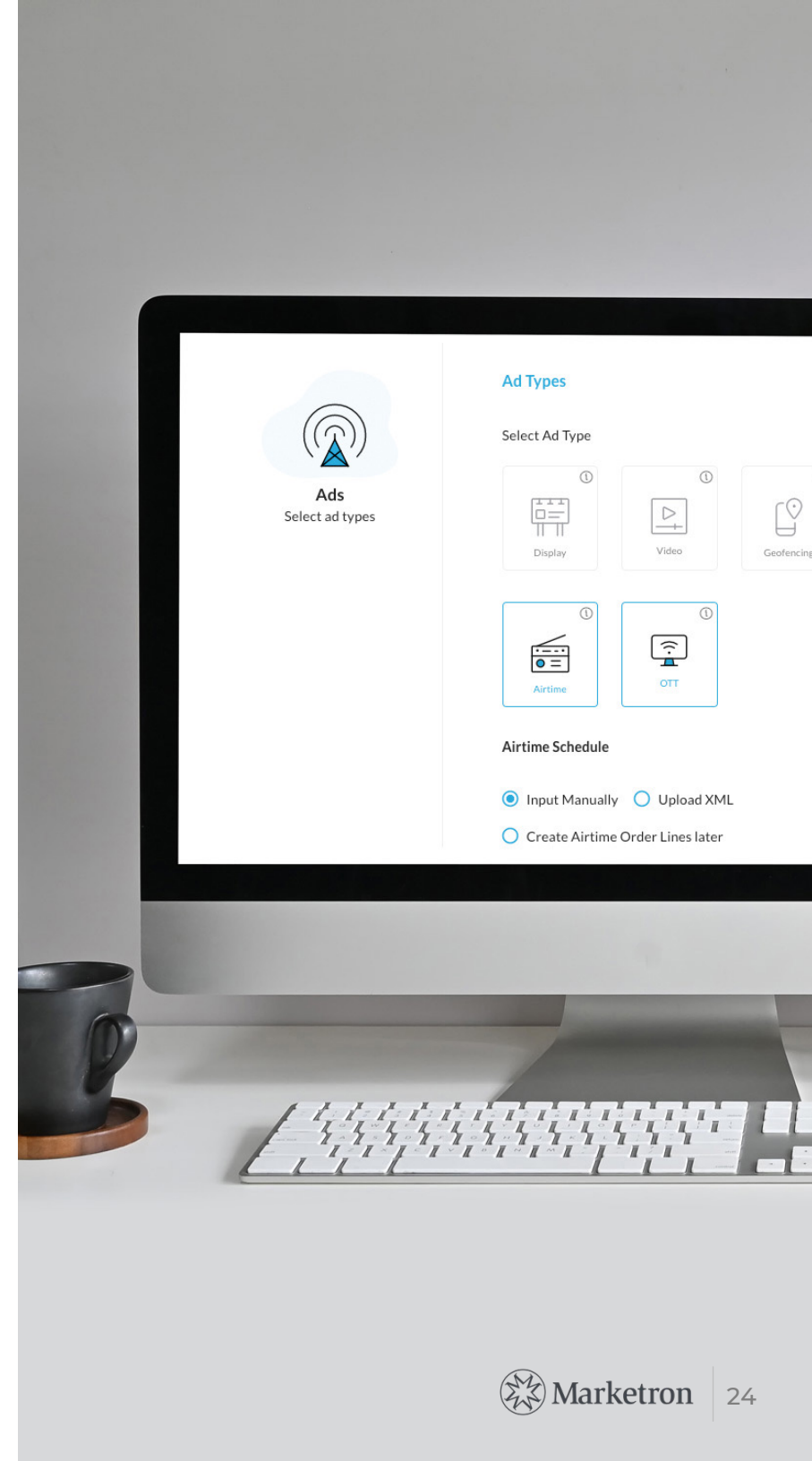
Create consistency with your offering.



## Expert Advice

"A company's proposal should offer consistency with customized solutions centered around identifying the problem, showing what success looks like with your solution in place, setting proper expectations with success stories, offering references that the prospect can call/email, and transparently stating the ROI."

Todd Kalman  
SVP of Sales, Marketron





# Presenting Your Solution

Avoid being verbose.



## Expert Advice

“Wordy proposals can lose clients. Instead of a five-page essay, use images and screenshot examples wherever possible to illustrate what your solution can look like.”

Lauren Pettus  
Digital Sales Manager, Today, Inc.

Don't think small.



## Expert Advice

“The pitch must show that you're thinking long-term and about the big picture. If you haven't asked enough questions, you'll show that you're thinking small and lose interest from the prospect.”

Karen Martinelli  
Digital Sales and Marketing Manager, Today Media



# Presenting Your Solution

Present the proposal in the meeting.



## Expert Advice

"Today, you can still meet over video conference, but avoid sending the proposal ahead of the call. You want to walk your prospect through it, so they don't make assumptions ahead of time."

Todd Kalman  
SVP of Sales, Marketron

Make no assumptions that someone else can deliver your message.



## Expert Advice

"Don't assume that a 'messenger' (e.g., a media buyer, or anyone else at an agency, or a subordinate employee) can adequately convey your value proposition to a decision maker. Find a way to capture the true buyer's attention first, and then let them invite others to the table who will evaluate your proposal on the decision maker's behalf."

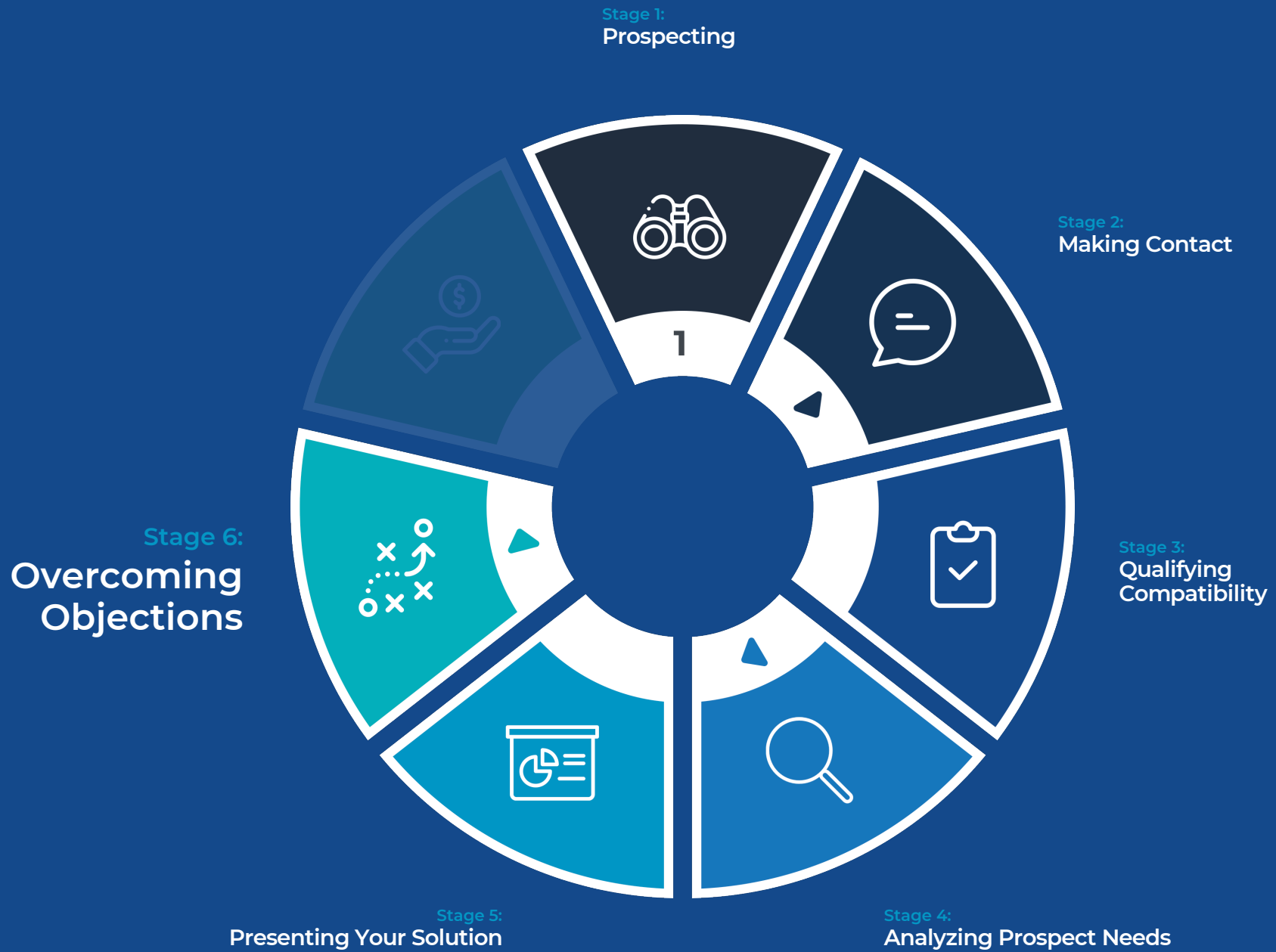
Jeff Ulrich  
Senior Manager of Digital Transformation, Marketron



## Listen to Be Heard

Above all, remember that no matter how much you include in your proposal, how professional it looks or how much time you spend on it, if it lacks a solid foundation, you'll struggle to sell the client. Take the time to create something that speaks to your prospect in a way that holds their attention and is an easy yes.





# Overcoming Objections

**After you present your solution, the journey isn't over.**

Next, you'll need to [overcome objections](#). If there is hesitation from the advertiser, you need to determine why.

The best way to learn this is by asking and providing them with the ability to voice any concerns. Before having this conversation, you'll want to prepare. If the organization doesn't understand the value of the solution, it's time to address why.

## Tips to Overcome Objections



01

**Actively listen, and ask simple questions.**

Ask, and you likely shall receive. Say something like, "What's not feeling right?" or "What should we revisit?" Start by getting their honest feedback without jumping to conclusions. Try to uncover the root of the objections. If appropriate, show them how you can adjust the proposed solution to meet these concerns or goals.

# Overcoming Objections



02

## Know the value of your assets.

Prospects may balk at the price or raise objections on how it will benefit their business. They could be looking for discounts, but it's important to never deflate the value of your products. Instead, make sure the client understands what's "in it for them" and how it will address their needs.

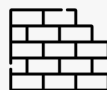
Get granular on the costs of creative, whether that be video, display ads, imagery or broadcast spots. Prove it's worth the time and money and that the value and ROI will be exponential.



03

## Empathize with them on price.

Price is always a stickler. Big numbers can seem intimidating. The key is to emphasize the return on ad spend (ROAS). Advertising is a cost center, but it's also a revenue generator. Demonstrate to the client that your solution will help them grow their business. If they see your solution as valuable, they will buy.



04

## Know your price boundary.

While you want to give advertisers the best deal possible, you still need to make a profit. If they have a price ceiling, it's going to be hard to break through it. Adding in lots of extra discounts may also come off as intentional inflation up front. Optimize pricing that fits within their budget, and propose any discounts from the start.



05

## Consider exchanging value.

If you meet them in the middle on price, consider exchanging value instead of just giving it. A prospect has more to offer than just their commitment to your proposal. Some other value exchanges could include the advertiser providing a testimonial or case study.

Another option is to inquire about trade or professional organizations with which you could collaborate. Ask for that opportunity up front, contingent on delivering success to their business. It's much easier to secure that opportunity if it's already a future consideration.

Ultimately, the best strategy for handling sales objections is to anticipate that they will happen. Being prepared makes it less likely that you'll be in a situation that you can't handle or refute.



## Stage 7

# Closing the Sale

**Closing the sale is arguably the hardest part of the cycle.**

It takes the right combination of reaching out, listening, staying in front of your prospects and adapting to their needs. Steps 1 through 6 got you here, and it's now time to ask them to sign. Since you've been building the relationship, it should be natural with no need for pressure.

## Quick Tips to Close the Sale



01

**Listen:** Once you uncover a real need, create a plan of action and design the blueprints, letting your client speak first. Hear what they have to say. If you are confident about your plan, your client will feel that about spending money with you now and in the future.



02

**Excite:** Present a contract, and cultivate excitement about the ad design process. Include some examples of successful creative from other clients to pique their interest. If they start talking about ad creative, they are ready to say yes.



# Closing the Sale



03

**Itemize:** Outline what they can expect throughout the campaign with a timeline for success. This includes a commitment date (and deposit, if necessary). Map out a creative and production schedule, including all approvals.



04

**Emphasize:** Advise of the dates that ad campaigns will run and when they can expect a surge in inquiries, calls and traffic.



05

**Urge:** Adding deadlines to a proposal is helpful to create a sense of urgency. Give a reason why you need their signature back, like anticipated kickoff dates, deadlines or space reservation.



06

**Manage:** Make sure to set expectations up front. Be as detailed as possible with what you need from them, along with due dates to drive success.



07

**Sign:** At a certain point, it's OK to ask for a signature. If both parties are in agreement, a signature is the next big box to check. Don't beg or be desperate.



08

**Connect:** This is a major decision, and you don't want your prospect going it alone. Hold their hand, and keep in conversation throughout the process to establish trust and connection.





# Closing the Sale



09

**Nurture:** Don't forget about the "after the sale" effect. Keep in touch to assure them that what they're experiencing during the campaign is on track. Back it up with reporting and, at the end, a full recap that will lead to confident renewals.



10

**Learn:** If a prospect ultimately says no, and there is no budging, make sure you understand why. Too often, a no can end conversations; however, there is critical information to learn. Ask for information that can help you in the next sale.



## Close the Sale Based on Trust

The sales cycle takes time. You'll constantly be adapting techniques. You'll learn from every prospect you engage, which helps you the next time. The most important thing is to lead with honesty and authenticity. If a customer trusts you, you'll win the sale.



# Seven Stages, Many Opportunities, One Solution

The broadcast sales process includes seven stages. Each step builds on the next and provides a clear path toward winning the business. You can streamline these stages better when you have the right technology — specifically, an advertising management solution that allows you to develop proposals, submit orders, track performance, invoice and share reporting with advertisers.

Marketron has a portfolio of products that align with the sales process. Connect with our experts today to explore the opportunities.

Get in Touch