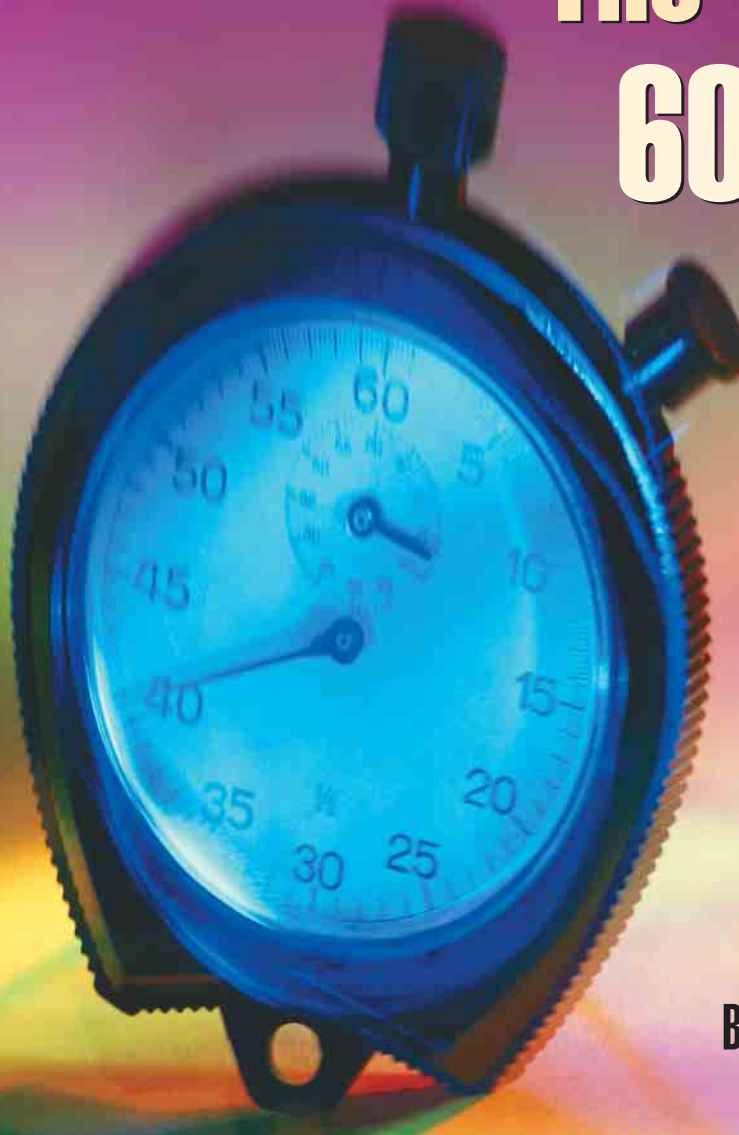


The 60-Second Sell



Making the most
of every second
spent with doctors
is critical to sales
reps' success.

BETH TENCH AND PAUL HENNESSEY

PHOTODISC

Pharmaceutical sales reps' jobs just keep getting tougher. Pressure from managed care to keep tight schedules and the advent of e-detailing services offered by companies such as mydrugrep.com, prescribingreference.com, and rxcentric have left doctors with little time or motivation to meet with the estimated 73,000 pharma reps in the field.

This article, based on GlaxoSmithKline's "Making Quality Contact" initiative, provides practical techniques for maximizing the benefits of unanticipated interactions and minimizing the failures that can kill sales opportunities.

The Challenge

Reps face an increasingly hostile selling environment in which physicians

- limit access to short, well-defined scheduling "windows"
- perceive little difference between effective and "sample dropping" reps
- see meetings with reps as social opportunities rather than business situations
- use receptionists and other "gatekeepers" to tightly control access to their time
- believe that reps can be replaced with e-detailing services.

In fact, according to the 1999 study,

"Access to High Prescribers: The World of Doorknob Details" by the Health Strategies Group, more than 40 percent of office visits fail to result in meeting with a doctor. When reps do get face time, more than 85 percent of those meetings last less than two minutes. Making the most of short, often unpredictable interactions with busy physicians is key to success.

Wrong Turns

Experience demonstrates that, in short sales interactions, reps make the following mistakes:

- fail to plan for shorter-than-expected meetings that result from doctors' schedule changes
- “dump” more information in brief physician encounters than they should
- alienate rather than build relationships with “gatekeepers”
- let physicians “sign (for samples) and run”
- fail to make the transition from social conversation to product discussion.

Those mistakes often cost reps access to doctors for longer appointments during which they could use the traditional selling skills they've learned. That training focuses on product knowledge—indications, side effects, and clinical trial results—and sales call communication skills such as presentation, overcoming objections, reading and responding to physicians' personal styles, and implementing marketing tactics.

Although critical to sales success, those skills are more appropriate for the traditional two-to ten-minute detail than for the more frequent and informal 30-to 120-second encounters. Reps need a “short interaction” skill set for achieving one goal: creating value with every interaction.

Lessons From Success

Success in this business is a numbers game. The higher a rep's percentage of successful short interactions, the more effective he or she will be in gaining access to physicians to detail products and influence prescribing behavior. To accomplish that, higher performers

- expect the unexpected, creating backup plans to frame the purpose of each encounter to establish value
- differentiate themselves, not just their products or companies, by becoming a resource for the physician

- accelerate closure by gaining some level of commitment from the physician.

Fast Footwork

The medical practice world is often chaotic, causing doctors to shift their priorities dramatically from day-to-day, minute-to-minute. Sales reps commonly discover that their expectations for regular scheduling are unrealistic and that they have to think on their feet. A rep may prepare for a five- to ten-minute meeting with a physician, only to learn she will only have 60 seconds. How should the rep adjust her strategy?

A rep might meet an important physician in a hospital hallway who she really wants to see but rarely encounters. The physician is receptive to a 30- to 60-second interaction. What should the rep say to differentiate herself and build value for the relationship? Reps often unexpectedly encounter doctors while refilling sample cases and have 30 seconds to do something more productive than socialize. How should they proceed?

Like good Scouts, smart sales reps understand how critical it is to be prepared for the unexpected, creating alternate objectives and backup plans for meetings with every important doctor—even for the shortest encounters. Given the frequency and brevity of those meetings, it is impossible for reps to develop thorough “sales plans” for each one.

Value Proposition

In sales, as in nearly everything else, value is subjective. The words reps use and the actions they take to promote prescription medicines can have a tremendous impact on how those products are perceived. Similarly, reps' ability to describe the purpose of brief physician meetings can help—or hurt—their ability to create value for their customers. They might begin by saying either of the following:

- “It's great to see you, Doctor. I was just stopping by to check your sample cabinet and do some restocking. Do you have a minute?”
- “It's great to see you, Doctor. I was hoping to have a quick opportunity to follow up, find out how your pa-

tients taking Product X have been doing since we last talked, and share some new information I think you'll find helpful.”

Each approach might work, but the first one leaves doctors in control of the agenda, making it easier for them to cut the meeting short. Although they might react similarly to the second approach, the sales rep has a better chance of accomplishing something valuable in the interaction. Unfortunately, many reps fail to recognize the importance of framing the purpose of short meetings, assuming that doctors see their products—and the benefits of discussing them—the same way they do. They may begin short sales interactions without describing their purpose.

Reps sometimes dive into product detailing too quickly or let doctors take control of the agenda. In every sales interaction, no matter how short, successful sales professionals begin planning by deciding what they want the customer to consider during the interaction and how to best describe the meeting's purpose to maximize its perceived value.

In short, reps must frame their time or have it framed for them. They need to control the process by creating explicit agendas, purposes, and frames of reference for every meeting, no matter how short.

Above the Crowd

Most pharma companies invest heavily in product training for their sales forces, understanding that reps need to differentiate their products from the competition's. In short sales interactions, however, *product* differentiation is often less important than *personal* differentiation. The goal is often to get doctors to see individual sales reps as valuable resources, so they are willing to spend time with them in subsequent meetings.

Many reps try to set themselves apart by providing product samples, creative give-aways, and free meals. Others dump product information on doctors, usually trying to communicate too much in a short time. Unfortunately, because other company's sales reps also employ those tactics, they fail.

A major differentiator is asking rather



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than telling. All pharma sales reps are trained to ask questions as part of the selling process. In a short interaction, they might ask:

- “Would it be helpful to set up in-service training on that subject for your office?”
- “What percentage of your patients have symptoms like those?”
- “Would you or a colleague like to attend an event at which Dr. Smith will speak about...?”

To stand out from the many other reps asking those questions, top sellers keep their queries short enough for a brief meeting but provocative enough to prompt doctors to stop and think. Such questions require doctors to prioritize, compare, share strong opinions or feelings, or respond to hypothetical situations:

- “How would you compare...?”
- “How do you feel about...?”
- “How would you prioritize the reasons why...?”
- “What would happen if...?”

Those questions stand out because they ask doctors to look at things differently and to create new information

rather than prompting them to supply what they and the reps already know, increasing the likelihood that both parties gain insight from a valuable exchange.

Closure and Commitment

Although not every interaction will result in a commitment to prescribe more product, each one can offer an opportunity to move the relationship closer to it. Top sales performers ask themselves:

- What commitment can I gain during the next interaction, even if it’s a short one?
- What low-risk commitments can I ask for that will improve my relationship or help differentiate my products?
- If I give something to the doctor, what might I ask for in return? How would I ask for it?

They may also use basic tools of psychological motivation to help secure commitments in short meetings. (See “Commitment Drivers.”) When they describe the things they might ordinarily give away too quickly during a brief interaction, they invoke scarcity, competition, authority, deadlines and similar motivational trig-

gers to encourage prompt action.

Common Sense

Pharma companies make huge investments in product development and sales force training, so even a small improvement in sales effectiveness can pay large dividends. Management should do the following:

Provide the right training.

Creating new and better “short encounter” selling behaviors requires skill, will, ability, and motivation. Training exercises that introduce those new approaches must both educate and offer compelling personal experiences that mirror reality, show sales reps the shortcomings of their current approaches, and bring them success using new ones.

Coach for performance.

Managers and first-line sales reps must speak a common language when they discuss how to succeed in brief sales interactions. That allows them to coach employees more effectively, making better use of joint calls and “ride-alongs” and enabling them to more

Commitment Drivers

Savvy sales pros establish value in the briefest encounters. They use a number of proven verbal tools to prompt action and accelerate closure:

Commitment Driver	Definition	Example
Scarcity	When something is perceived to be in short supply, the other party will be more motivated to take action to get it.	“We have only two seats left at the dinner presentation where Dr. Jones will be speaking. I wasn’t clear if I should reserve one for you.”
Deadline	If the other party feels that a valuable opportunity will soon be unavailable, he will be more motivated to act now to acquire it.	“I have to finalize the reservation list tonight for the dinner at which Dr. Jones will be speaking. Should I add you to the list?”
Competition	Injecting an element of competition often accelerates closure.	“I know that both Dr. Brown and Dr. Smith are interested in seeing this video before the end of the month, but if you want to review it, I’ll make it available to you—if we can set a time to talk about it the next time I’m here.”
Authority	When an expert endorses a course of action, the other party perceives that action as less risky.	“Dr. Mitchell, head of surgery at the University Medical Center, just wrote an article saying that this product yields better results for her patients than anything else she has tried. Would you be interested in trying it with a few of your patients?”

efficiently model effective selling behavior.

Communicate management's focus on the issue.

Sales reps want to know what works and why some objectives are more important than others. Part of the effort to improve short-interaction performance hinges on effective communication from management about the importance of making quality contact during every physician encounter. ■



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Making the Most of Brief Encounters

Successful reps view their interactions with physicians differently than the others do. Here's how.

Short Meeting

Expect the unexpected, preparing to shift gears if the situation is different from what they expect.

Frame the purpose of the interaction to help the doctor see its value quickly.

Differentiate *themselves*, often by asking short, provocative questions.

Ask simpler questions that get the physician to stop and think.

Motivate commitment to appropriate "next steps" that might lead to increased sales.

Longer Meeting

Develop sales objectives assuming they have the physician's attention for a period of time.

Frame the purpose of the meeting around educating the physician and motivating higher levels of prescription.

Differentiate their *products*, usually through effective detailing.

Ask complex questions to gather detailed information to help them sell.

Gain commitment to prescribe at higher levels.

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- Helping implement "go-to-market" strategies successfully; and
- Building skills across the organization for creating profitable agreements, both internally and externally.

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