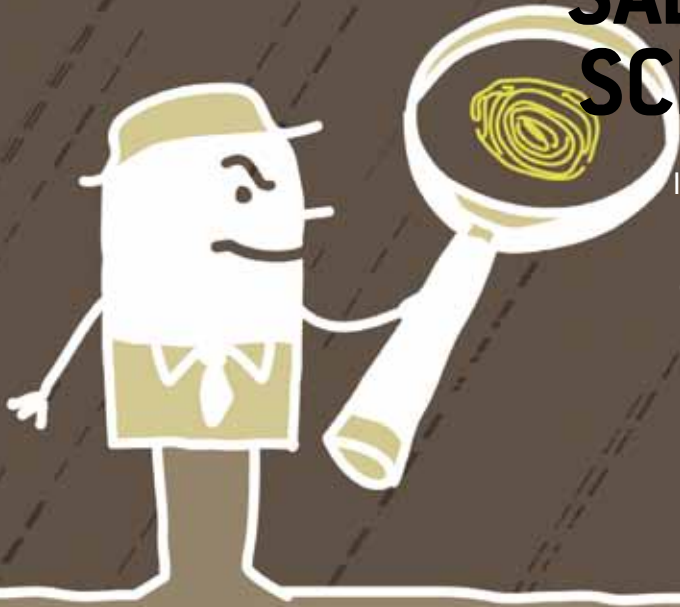


# SALES POLICE: AT THE SCENE OF THE CRIME



INTERSEC 2011, AT THE DUBAI WORLD TRADE CENTRE IN JANUARY, PRESENTED THE PERFECT VENUE TO OBSERVE A FEW STELLAR COMPANIES ATTEMPT TO CONVERT PROSPECTS INTO CLIENTS. FAR TOO MANY EXHIBITORS STAGED A CRIMINAL WASTE OF TIME. JENNIFER BAXAVANIS, FOUNDER AND MANAGING PARTNER, BAX CONSULTING, COLLECTS EVIDENCE AND SUBMITS A POST-MORTEM REPORT.



Intersec is the leading regional expo for security and safety sectors, promoting solutions from multiple countries to a region that craves a safe and orderly community. As with any trade show, suppliers create snazzy stands, dress smart, and wait for potential buyers to approach their stand so they can lure them into a dance that exchanges a business card for a brochure, a smile for an e-mail, and a shake of a hand for a new relationship.

I attended the show as an undercover "sales police officer" to discover:

1. Current trends in security and safety;
2. If products were easy to buy, and;
3. How effective promoters were engaging the prospects approaching their stand

## Trends and display

Security and occupational health and safety (H&S) are now featuring expenditure on technology. There is no doubt that IT is changing; and manpower is being preserved, not necessarily replaced, by alarm

detection and video surveillance. This technology senses security/safety threats, and it works by closing doors, opening exits, amongst other procedures, when our security or safety officer could be on a WC break. The name of the game, now, in security and safety is not replacing officers, but complimenting their function, with proactive systems, as opposed to reactive ones.

## How were the suppliers displaying these trends?

The smarter stands had hands-on gadgets and big screen computers where you could see yourself playing with the gadgets onscreen, live. These displays created a bandwagon effect: the more visitors you saw on a stand playing with gadgets watching themselves on the screen, the more attracted you were to join in and do the same. The supplier lured you in and he was ready for your questions about the device.

**Lesson learned:** Each buyer has a different modality and style that influences his buying decision. The stands that had one modality, for example, one sales person and one

screen that was non-interactive attracted half of the visitors as a stand that allowed you to play, sense, and feel. A supplier offering an array of stimulus like touch, see, hear, and possibly smell, increases the possibility of attraction in any display.

## Are making your product easy to buy?

IT was a big component of Intersec 2011 with suppliers promoting their latest gadgets. So what?! Is a 5 megapixel sensor better than a 3.5 megapixel sensor when it comes to a camera or is it just a bigger number? Who can show me the real difference without Photoshop or special paper?

So which to chose from? If all suppliers have the same technology that have the same features, could the buyer default his decision to the price? As the "sales police officer", I searched eight Halls looking for one tagline that offered a benefit. Something like "5 mega pixel sensors so you can see his shoe size from 20 meters away." I could not find even one.

Any smart salesperson would turn to me and say, "Well, Jennifer, our buyers already know the benefits."

**As the "sales police officer", I searched eight Halls looking for one tagline that offered a benefit. Something like "5 mega pixel sensors so you can see his shoe size from 20 meters away." I could not find even one**

I do not doubt they do. However, benefits sell, features inform. When I go to the car dealership, and the sales person informs me that the car I like gets 60 miles per gallon, I am impressed. When he tells me the car gets 60 miles per gallon hence I will save 200 AED per month on my gasoline bill, I am impressed and I want to buy, as that piece of information suddenly feels so close and personal – my money!

I walked around with the president of an Occupational H&S training provider based in Dubai, and interviewed him on what he thought of his potential suppliers' stands. As I asked him, we passed a stand with two women dressed in skimpy red tights and hot tops. He chuckled and said, "Sex doesn't sell in security or safety; that is for the motorsports. We need something a little more serious to attract us to a stand."

Nevertheless, the best combination of hormones and display of benefits was the FireFit Championship taking place all three days in the Plaza where international fire-fighting teams competed using all sorts of resources and supplies. The stands were always full of visitors, so sponsors' logos and taglines surrounding the arena were quite impactful because the audience was galvanised with emotion.

**Lesson learned:** Any evident display or in-your-face benefits attracts a buyer and sells to them. Benefits that jump out at any buyer are: saving time, saving money, saving lives, increasing compliance, and increased health. Stating benefits lets the buyer feel the product or service with an emotional stimulus, hence an emotional response. A sales person can sell, but a buyable product is one that includes an evident display of benefits, not only the features.

## Engagement of potential buyers

Security or safety trends have evolved more towards proactive systems; however, security and safety sales engineers have barely evolved from a 1960's traditional sales model



Jennifer Baxavanis, Founder and Managing Partner, BAX Consulting

**Benefits sell, features inform. When I go to the car dealership, and the salesperson informs me that the car I like gets 60 miles per gallon, I am impressed. When he tells me the car gets 60 miles per gallon hence I will save 200 AED per month on my gasoline bill, I am impressed and I want to buy**

approach. Sales engineers at Intersec 2011 were still product dumping, for the most part.

Suppliers, at a trade show just like in their marketplace, have options of engagement: they can set out a net

and drag you in, hand in hand, or they can use a display or invitation to attract you in. As the "sales police officer" I decided to freely enter a number of stands and pose as a buyer to test the promoters' sales approach. I walked on smiling and stated I was a consultant for Security and Occupational H&S providers, and I wanted to know about their products, as "I give advice to my clients on buying decisions." To my dismay, 98% of the salespeople took the bait and ran to the product pitch. I was dumped with products, specs and information. Yawn...I left like any smart buyer, "Don't call me, I'll call you," and left the sales person wondering and depleted of energy.

So what about the other 2%? What did they do differently that left them full of energy and calculating their commissions by the time I left? These 2% of salespeople at Intersec 2011 were the Sales Superheroes, as they qualified me as a buyer, dodged my energetic interest for their product pitch (dump); and sat me down with fact finding questions.

## Bingo!

I pushed hard, and kept on baiting these salespeople with fast and furious buying signals for their products. Nevertheless, these Sales Superheroes abided by the consultative selling process and would not relent to my powers. They assessed my needs and my clients' needs with a series of fact finding pre-determined questions, and in relation to the answers, pitched the products most suitable to my needs. The Sales Superheroes do not have to close deals with any tricky closing techniques. After a well-thought-out fact finding exercise followed by a product presentation that matches benefits to the buyers' discovered

needs, the buyer will simply say "Wow, that makes sense!" Bingo!

**Lesson learned:** Salespeople who spend less energy inviting themselves to see buyers and dumping products on them, and more energy on planning a diagnostic or fact finding questionnaire that truly assesses the needs of the customer, will fill their pockets with commissions faster. The traditional sales model of introduction + chit chat + product dump + tricky close is as safe as believing that locking doors at a bank is secure these days. Today, the buyers are much smarter as they can access information about all their possibilities before they entertain the idea of you being their supplier. An effective salesperson is proactive in biting the tongue and finding out the prospects' needs and wrapping the product offering around the customers' responses.

In conclusion, the business transactions taking place during Intersec 2011 exemplify the approach and technique that your sales force is currently practicing, day to day, inclusive of all characters: smart buyers, product dumpers and Sales Superheroes. Intersec 2011 exhibitors, just like SMEs, have more time to arrange their product offering and displays and have a small window of opportunity to engage customers per visit.

So my round as the sales police made me file the following report with recommendations: 1) When trying to attract the customer use all modalities and display benefits, and 2) when engaging customers face to face, finding out their needs first will increase your closing ratio and top line. ■

## ABOUT:

Jennifer Baxavanis is the founder and Managing Partner of a sales and training consultancy that specialises in sales-performance training and market development. She offers "free-agent" on-the-ground expertise, and help to identify and sell your products or services to new customers and new segments from a bird's eye view. She also designs and delivers sales training. For more information see [www.baxllc.com](http://www.baxllc.com).