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THE NOW IN THE QUESTION

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Quick Summary: Although many buying signs may be made, the actual receipt of the order is all that matters.

Abstract:

“Are we there yet?” is the standard, relentless question asked by every child on the way to the amusement park or birthday party. For them, “almost there” becomes the standard answer (which they hate). Far less predictable is the “now” associated with receiving a purchase commitment from a prospect. Instead of planning, we often end up hoping for the order.

The NOW in the question “Who is the Customer, and what is their Single Most Compelling Reason to Buy Now from You?” could mean today, this week, this month, or even this quarter. When waiting for the receipt of an order, there always seems to be one unanticipated delay after another. Remember as a child asking mom or dad, “Are we there yet?” As a child, it always used to amaze me how parents could answer that question with a non-answer such as “almost” or “soon” without the same emotions and anticipation I had when I asked it. In waiting to receive an order from a prospect, “now” often becomes “any day now.” After the delay has occurred, the reason often becomes obvious and even predictable. In most instances, the seller’s desire to close the sale seems to mask the mechanical, serial steps that typically occur and are easy to forecast but are often ignored.

The definition of “Now” is often assumed but can be easily misunderstood. For example, does “Now” mean:

- A verbal commitment from who is believed to be the key decision maker?
- The issuance of a letter of intent?
- A purchase order being “cut” and working through the channels?
- The City Council or some other committee approving the purchase?
- The receipt of the buyer’s “standard terms and conditions”?
- A call from the buyer’s purchasing, finance, or legal department regarding your terms?

All of these events are clearly great signs, but none of them mean the “Buy, Now” has occurred. One method I have often used when I have heard that “we will receive the order any day now” is to ask if the buyer’s legal council has already started to review the terms and conditions of the deal. If the answer is “I don’t know” or “Not yet,” I reset my expectations of “now” to thirty to sixty days.

The mechanics of moving a commitment through the system can cause unexpected delays, and seasonal variations can be equally troublesome. For example, some shippers and retailers “lockdown” their

systems from early October until mid-January to avoid making any changes that could disrupt the flow of business during the holiday season. In this case, expecting to receive an order, ship the product or implement the service, train the users, or work out any initial implementation issues must start well before the lockdown period.

As another example, you may push very hard to receive an order before the end of your quarter just as your prospect is focused on receiving orders from their customers at the same time. Do not expect them to focus on your issues before they have resolved their own.

Finally, the ultimate “now killers” are “We are convinced. We will add it to next year’s budget,” “We will move forward after the election,” or “We are going to ask just one more time for others to give their best and final offer.”

The most effective way of forecasting when “now” will occur is to start backward from the point that the customer has fully implemented your product or service and then work backward, filling in reasonable time frames and seasonal issues that will occur no matter how compelling the reason to buy may be.

“Now” can be a long time away. Plan accordingly.