

Air Time - "Maximized or Mangled?"

Written By Rob Scanlon - Sales Scientist



Does it make sense for you to read this?

If you or your sales-team...

- Sell in an environment where there is very little competition...
- Sell by processing transactions versus wrestling down sales...

Then it probably would make more sense to peruse the pile of unread magazines or books sitting under your desk rather than read this short paper.

If, on the other hand...

- Your selling world is highly competitive with **hand-to-hand** selling contests...
- Your sale is a complex sale ...
- You believe that getting your message across to your prospects is a critical success factor...

Then the few minutes spent reading this short paper might make sense.

What is 'Air Time'?

Air Time might be defined as follows:

Air Time is the amount of time and the amount of attention units a prospect gives to each potential seller.

Where complex sales are made in competitive selling environments, prospects grace sellers with a limited number of attention units and a limited amount of time. During this 'air time' prospects scrutinize the sellers.

The selling challenge is not dissimilar to the challenge television networks have for prime-time programming. Each network has a limited number of prime-time slots. The revenue a

network can generate with these slots is based upon how much attention and how many viewers they command for their programming.



In competitive selling situations prospects give each competitor a limited amount time and attention for formal and informal discussions. The competitive team that maximizes their 'air time' has the greatest chance of having their messages embraced. Obviously, getting a prospect to embrace our messages has significant impact on our ability to win.

How is 'Air Time' Wasted?

Here are some classic ways in which sellers waste their 'air time':

Fumbled Messages

There are those moments in sales situations when you know the prospect is open and attentive to your message.

These opening might appear through prospect questions like these:

"How are you guys different?"

"Tell me what you do."

"How would you approach our situation?"

"What have you done for organizations like ours?"

"What do we get out of this when we are fully implemented?"

"What might this cost if we were to move ahead with you in the areas you described?"

"This is great. How will it fit into how we do things today?"

From a selling and messaging point of view, these are scoring opportunities. We cannot fumble when we have the opportunity to score.

Unfortunately many sellers squander these opportunities. When the opportunity appears the selling team is too often ...

**unprepared,
inarticulate,
ill-informed,
imprecise, or
elusive.**

'Air time' squandered is lost forever. We need to use additional 'air time' to recover from fumbles. The scoring opportunity is rarely the same.

Flinches At Objections

Most competitive selling situations have moments where the prospect poses an objection which consciously or unconsciously is a test for the seller.

The seller's response to this 'blush-test' can have tremendous impact on whether the sales discussion proceeds or sales opportunity dies a 'polite' but immediate death.

If the seller responds to the objection with confidence, grace, and a reasonable response, then the seller can proceed through the next steps.

If the seller flinches, does not display confidence, or does not provide a reasonable response, then one of following typically occurs:

1. 'Air time' is spent on second and third attempts at appropriately handling the objection.

2. The prospect team is polite but they tacitly decide the 'game is over' for that seller.
3. The prospect overtly communicates that the 'game is over' and the seller is summarily dismissed.
4. The prospect 'stews' and later on in the evaluation process 'bounces' the seller for their inability to answer the question.
5. The prospect sees the flinch, smells the blood, and the shark feeding frenzy ensues with a barrage of new objections.

Flinches trap the sellers in the mire of defensive discussions. Flinches cause sellers to fail the 'blush test'.

Many sales cycles have been truncated because the seller flinched.

Confusing the Prospect

Selling complex solutions always presents a messaging challenge. There are many moving parts and many topics to discuss during our 'air time'.

It is also difficult to be clear and consistent across a broad range of topics demanding different levels of detail.

The complexity of the solution, the variables of the situation, and the number of sales-team members engaged in the opportunity all provide rich soil for confusion.

Confusion can swallow 'air time' by moving discussions to tangential and even irrelevant issues.

It is obvious we should avoid confusion and be clear, but how do we measure whether we are clear enough with our 'air time'?

Here are some simple tests:

1. How many attempts did it take to answer the questions?
2. How many times did we have to address the same issue?
3. How many times did one of our comments trigger a journey to a foreign and obscure land?
4. How well do our messages resonate with the prospect?
5. Do our messages have 'Pass-It-On' stickiness?
6. How well can 'mere mortals' repeat our messages?
7. How likely will it be that prospects in the room will be able to accurately repeat our messages to prospects not in the room?

Contradictions

How many times have you been in sales situations where one member of the selling team contradicts something said by another member of the selling team?

Contradictions can be devastating to the sales campaign. They are pernicious consumer of 'air time'.

Contradictions may occur in the same meeting or separate meetings.

Contradictions cause two major problems:

1. The prospect gets confused.
2. The prospect gets 'spooked' about the competency of seller.

The seller needs to use valuable 'air time to address both problems.

In the first case the seller needs to eradicate the confusion.

In the second case the seller needs to rebuild the trust in the seller's competence.

Trust is fragile and very difficult to recover. Rebuilding trust is a voracious eater of 'air time'.

A single gaff of contradiction can simultaneously create confusion, and erode trust. A single contradictory comment can cut our 'air time' in half.

How Do These Time Wasters Impact Our Ability to Compete and Win?

Three scenarios follow.

Three different sellers compete for the same business.

All three sellers are given equal 'air time'.

In each of these scenarios the sellers use their 'air time' differently.

For each seller we will measure how effectively they used their 'air time'.

Re-work Fumbled Messages, Confusion, etc.								
 Use of Air Time								
 Use of Air Time								
AIR TIME	30 Minutes	45 Minutes	60 Minutes	75 Minutes	90 Minutes	105 Minutes	120 Minutes	2 Minute- Drill

Selling Team A

Re-work Fumbled Messages, Confusion, etc.						Re-work #5 Technical Confusion	Re-work #3 Objections	Yes Required
Use of Air Time			3. Objection #1	4. Objection #2	5. Technical Question			
Use of Air Time	1. How we help clients	2. Success Story						
AIR TIME	30 Minutes	45 Minutes	60 Minutes	75 Minutes	90 Minutes	105 Minutes	120 Minutes	2 Minute- Drill

Selling Team A does a very good job explaining how they help customers like the prospect with whom they are meeting.

Selling Team A does an excellent job of capturing the prospect's imagination and interest with a highly descriptive and compelling customer reference story.

The meeting is going well.
Sales Team A is maximizing their 'air time'.

The prospect then poses an objection. It is clearly a test for the seller.

The seller fumbles the response.
The tone of meeting changes a bit.

Unsatisfied with the response to the first objection, the prospect poses a second objection.

Selling Team A is now a bit nervous and fumbles the second objection.



The meeting proceeds even though everyone in the room knows that the two objections were not handled appropriately.

A technical discussion begins. The prospect is now a bit skeptical; so while the technical members of selling team are explaining the details of the solution, the prospect peppers them with very specific and challenging questions.

It is clear to the Selling Team A that they have no chance of moving through the selection process without getting better clarity on the two objections and the technical misconceptions. They double-back and use valuable 'air time' to address the objections and outstanding technical issues.

Selling Team A shows great perseverance and a genuine concern to address the questions of the prospect. Unfortunately, their mumbling and fumbling has swallowed almost all their 'air' time. With two minutes of remaining 'air time', Selling Team A closes by hurriedly sharing their value proposition.

Selling Team B

Re-work Fumbled Messages, Confusion, etc.		Rework of #1 How we Help – Value			Rework of #3 Objections		Rework of #4	No Time To Close
 Use of Air Time	1. How we help clients			3. Objection #1		4. Contradiction		
 Use of Air Time			2. Success Story					
AIR TIME	30 Minutes	45 Minutes	60 Minutes	75 Minutes	90 Minutes	105 Minutes	120 Minutes	2 Minute- Drill

Selling Team B begins with high level ‘fluff’ about their company, its history, locations, and irrelevant awards. It is not clear to the prospect how Selling Team B helps customers. The prospect team becomes confused, then impatient, and finally asks the Selling Team B, “So what do you guys do?”

Selling Team B, acting in a recovery mode, spend valuable ‘air time’ rescuing their messages about how they help customers.

In their rescuing effort, Selling Team B is successful in providing a very good customer reference which captures the prospect’s imagination and interest.

The meeting is back on track.

The prospect then poses their test objection.

The seller fumbles the response.

Selling Team B wastes several minutes making attempts at answering the objection. Someone on Selling Team B actually has an excellent answer for the objection, but the sellers have

not anticipated the objection or practiced the response, so they fumble at answering the objection. On the fourth attempt, Selling Team B finally provides an answer which makes sense to the prospect team.

One member of the prospect team asks the sellers about one of the errant comments made answering the objection. This comment is a direct contradiction to an important point made by another member of Selling Team B at a previous meeting. The rest of ‘air time’ is wasted trying to reconcile the ‘truth’ on this issue.



The meeting ends with the discussion stuck on this last issue and the prospect wondering the following:

What is the truth?

Is Seller B interested in telling the truth?

Is Seller B competent – do they even know the truth?

Selling Team C

Re-work Fumbled Messages, Confusion, etc.								
 Use of Air Time								
 Use of Air Time	1. How we help clients	2. Success Story #1	3. Objection #1	4. Objection #2	5. Technical Question	6. Success Story #2	7. Summarize Fit 1 through 6	
AIR TIME	30 Minutes	45 Minutes	60 Minutes	75 Minutes	90 Minutes	105 Minutes	120 Minutes	2 Minute-Drill

Selling Team C begins well with a clear description of how they help customers. They give an engaging customer success story.

Selling Team C prepared for a several anticipated objections so when the first objection is posed they answer it crisply and appropriately. Selling Team C passes the first test.

The prospect team, satisfied with the answer to first objection, poses a second objection. Again, Selling Team C was prepared for the objection and answers it to the satisfaction of the prospect on the first attempt.

Selling Team C's efficiency in opening the meeting and handling the objections provides 'air time' for them to have a technical discussion with the prospect. During this

technical discussion all the members of Selling Team C execute the messages as they have practiced. The result is a clear and coordinated technical discussion.

After the technical discussion, Selling Team C shares a second customer success story which resonates with the prospect and reinforces the messages in the opening, the objections, and the technical discussion.

Having managed their 'air time' extremely well Selling Team C, leverages the last few fifteen minutes summarizing their messages. They do this in a relaxed and unhurried fashion.

How Does the 'Air Time' Usage of the Teams Compare?

What is the Impact of the 'Air Time' Usage on the Potential for Winning?

Selling Team A	Selling Team B	Selling Team C
Did not answer one of the Objections.	Put their integrity and competence in question by contradicting themselves.	Shared two success stories.
Missed the opportunity to share a 2 nd Success Story.	Never got to technical discussion so they left a huge question about their technical fit.	Answered both objections.
Put their credibility in question with two fumbled objections.	Spent 85% of the time defending or re-stating.	Covered the technical fit.
Put their Technical fit in question with initial confusion.	Missed the 2 nd Success Story.	Was not defensive or rushed.
Rushed to Close the Meeting with a 'drive-by' closing Value Proposition.	Never had a chance to Close the Meeting with their Value Proposition.	Closed with a solid summary and effective Value Proposition.

Which one of these selling teams would you want to be?

Given the significance of messaging in winning a sale which one of these three selling teams has the best chance of winning?

What competitive advantages are gained by the effective use of 'air time'?

In the selling of complex solutions,
 In highly competitive selling situations,
 'Air Time' matters.



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