

6 Negotiation Strategies Every Marketer Should Know



There's a reason why we love TV courtroom dramas. Beyond the shocking objections and confessions, it seems like there's constant screentime for strong, powerful arguments.

As marketers, that last part is especially exciting. Whether we know it or not, we are unabashed nerds for all things negotiation -- and it's a skill that all of us should master.

That could be why we're drawn to a well-written, televised version of a compelling argument. We love seeing people making a case for what they believe in, and wish we could do it as well ourselves, like when we're trying to negotiate a budget allocation or a project.

But with the right strategies and skills, you *can* learn to negotiate. It's practical, valuable knowledge that can be applied almost anywhere -- especially in the marketing realm.

Why Do Marketers Need to Negotiate?

When I speak with marketers, it seems like there's always something that has to be negotiated. A lot of the time, it's the allocation of resources -- budget, new hires, or time.

There are other marketing-specific times when negotiation is necessary, though. Maybe you're working out a co-marketing agreement. Or maybe you're trying to make a case for your own ideas.

Regardless, being prepared for these conversations is key. A big part of that is confidence -- after all, 19% of folks don't negotiate because they're afraid of looking too pushy. We get it. Negotiating is kind of scary, especially when you're new to it.

But arriving to these discussions with the right expectations and information can make them a little less intimidating. We picked six techniques that can be applied in a broad range of negotiations -- at work, or wherever else.

6 Negotiation Techniques Every Marketer Should Know

1) Focus on interests, not positions.

In the context of negotiation, there's a big difference between focusing on interests and focusing on positions. While interests refer to **an outcome that will benefit you**, positions refer to **your stance on a particular issue**.

Co-marketing, as we noted above, is a place where this concept plays out quite a bit. Let's say a small business is trying to partner with one that has a larger reach.

- The smaller company might think, "We want our names attached to yours."
- The larger might say, "Well, we already reach the same audience. What's in it for us?"

Those are the *positions* of each company: "You should partner with us," versus "We don't need you."

That's where the smaller company has to think about the underlying *interests* of the larger one and how they might, in fact, need each other.

"Larger companies may have a large reach, but what do they *not* have?" asks HubSpot's Manager of Content Marketing Strategy, Lisa Toner. "Do they not have resources to create really great content for their audience?"

That could be an interest of the larger business: Gaining resources to create things like compelling design or apps. "It's all about the pitch, and if you can offer an experience [your opponent] or their customers would welcome," Toner says, "without them having to do the work."

But determining these interests requires research and creativity, Toner says. And she's not alone -- in the book *Negotiating Rationally*, Max H. Bazerman and Margaret A. Neale note that "creative solutions can be found by redefining the conflict for each side, identifying their underlying interests, and brainstorming for a wide variety of potential solutions."

So while your opponent might have a different position on the surface, you might actually have interests in common. Knowing what those are can help you frame the conversation in a way that sets you both up for success.

2) Have "if-then" scenarios -- and a backup plan.

When you enter a negotiation, it's valuable to have different scenarios and alternatives in mind. In business school, we were taught to frame these with an "If-Then Matrix": A table with rows of "if"s -- the things we wanted, but the opponent might say no to. Those were followed by columns of "then"s -- the items that would become non-negotiable if the client refused the "if."

Having options in mind can help to mitigate some of the fear that comes with negotiating. For one, it clarifies your priorities: A recent survey showed that 56% of women won't negotiate a job offer because they don't know what to ask for, which implies that a lot of people -- male and female -- haven't considered what's most important to them.

Maybe work-life balance matters more to you than salary. In that case, *if* your employer says no to your payment requirements, *then* flexible hours might become non-negotiable.

If	Then...	Then...	Then...
Salary requirements	Flexible hours	Increased PTO	Work from home
Flexible hours	Salary requirements	Increased PTO	Work from home
Increased PTO	Salary requirements	Flexible hours	Work from home
Work from home	Salary requirements	Flexible hours	Increased PTO

Do this with all of the "if"s that matter most to you. *If* flexible hours are also met with resistance, *then* what will your sticking points be?

And that's where we also need to consider the BATNA -- or, best alternative to a negotiated agreement. Sometimes, no matter how prepared you are for a negotiation, you might not reach an agreement. Then what?

You'll need to know the answer to that question before you even enter the conversation -- that's your BATNA. In fact, have multiple alternatives in mind -- the more options you have, the less likely you are to feel completely helpless if your negotiation results in a stalemate.

An "If-Then" matrix can be helpful here, too. Know which factors will be at play if you don't reach an agreement, and what the implications will be for your customers, your company, your team, and yourself. Don't focus on defeat -- focus on what you *can* do, and the actionable items that come with it.

Remember: Negotiation isn't an all-or-nothing process. Think about your interests, then determine your options based on the ones that are most important to you.

3) Use creativity to your advantage.

When it comes to negotiation, creativity is key.

In one study of MBA students, participants were divided into two groups for different workshops -- one that focused on systematic problem solving, and the other on solutions that directed students to “have fun,” “refrain from criticizing your ideas,” and “look for new possibilities.”

Each group then had negotiate a budget allocation. The students that underwent the creative training -- the one that emphasized unconventional ideas and outcomes -- executed the task better than the one that went through a more traditional workshop.

Studies like that show the value of creativity in generating unique alternative solutions and possibilities, and that is a lesson that you should think about when creating your negotiation agenda. You see, if an agenda resembles an itemized list with strict topics like budget and personnel, it tends to put the focus on positions, like “I need 35% of the budget,” or “I need 10 employees reallocated to our team.” But it doesn't address *why* those needs exist -- the interests behind them.

To combat that, try to focus on more open-ended things like goals and concerns. In that case, you're leading with the *why* -- the underlying interests that are at the root of each side's position.

Maybe your opponent is concerned that her team can't handle its growing workload, and that's why she wants to add 10 people. With that perspective, her interest isn't really about personnel allocation, as much as it's about preventing her employees from burning out. That opens the door to discussing more creative solutions.

4) Think about what matters most to your opponent.

I know what you're thinking. “We *know*. Focus on *interests*. We get it!”

It's true. Understanding your opponent's priorities can more quickly uncover those underlying interests that I keep harping at. And yes -- they'll also help you align their interests with yours, and determine mutually beneficial outcomes.

But thinking about what matters most to your opponent can also give you an idea of what kind of questions he might ask. And you can prepare

responses for those questions, gathering the data to support your answers in advance.

That will also help you figure out which questions you want to ask during the negotiation. When my colleague, Juliana Nicholson, was writing an ebook, she really wanted to include a certain organization as a case study. But they were hesitant to be featured, she said, because they were “very sensitive to how we framed them.”

At the same time, she told me, they “really wanted the exposure.” Knowing that was important to them helped Nicholson figure out the best questions to put them at ease, and gave them a sense of control in the process -- questions like, “Can we use your real name and logo, so that we can link back to your site and drive traffic there?”

Notice how she cited a benefit in her question. She was asking for permission to do something -- to use real identifiers of the organization, instead of a pseudonym -- while immediately noting the positive outcomes of doing so.

And by posing it as a question, instead of stating it as a fact -- “Doing X will result in Y” -- Nicholson gave her opponent a sense of control over the process. Because she knew how much that mattered to them, she was able to phrase her questions in a way that addressed their interests in both control and exposure.

So don't be afraid to relinquish a little bit of jurisdiction during a negotiation, especially when it comes to your opponent's priorities.

5) Understand cultural elements -- and how other cultures negotiate.

When you enter a negotiation, you'll want to set the stage for a positive, proactive discussion. It goes without saying, then, that you probably don't want to offend your opponent.

But accidentally offending your counterparts might be easier than you'd expect, especially if you're negotiating with international peers. And that's

becoming more and more likely in business. HubSpot, for example, has offices in five different countries -- that definitely shapes the way we do business.

It wouldn't hurt to brush up on the business etiquette of your opponent's native country. Here are some categories to consider when preparing for an international negotiation.

Physical Cues

In researching other cultures, I've learned that there are things I do naturally and unconsciously -- like elaborately moving my arms when I talk -- that would offend my colleagues in other countries. So in addition to doing my intellectual homework, I would have to physically prepare for a negotiation for my Chinese counterparts, and practice sitting still during a conversation.

My colleague, Leslie Ye, breaks down some do's and don'ts on physical behavior in each country here.

Silence

In the U.S., we often joke about the discomfort of an awkward silence. So it makes sense that other cultures -- like Japan -- use silence with the "hope the other side will speak," writes University of Hawaii Professor John Barkai, and end up revealing something valuable, for the sake of saying anything at all.

But instead of letting the silence get awkward, use it to reflect. And if you do decide to speak first, take advantage of the quiet to think carefully about what you're going to say.

Punctuality

Being on time is one of those things that starkly varies according to country. Just look at this guide to international business etiquette from my colleague, Lindsay Kolowich -- how many countries have punctuality listed as important?

It's important to know when you'll be expected to be on time, and when you can anticipate the opposite from your counterpart. In France, for example, "you're considered 'on time' if you're 10 minutes late," writes Kolowich.

Knowing how each culture treats timeliness will help you plan for and keep your negotiation efficient -- and leave out the element of surprise if your guests arrive later than the scheduled start time.

6) Prepare your team.

You are so totally prepared for this negotiation. Great! What about the people sitting next to you at the table?

Even if you're the one doing all of the talking, prepare any colleagues who will be present for the negotiation. Transparency is crucial here -- your team should be briefed on any information that might arise during the negotiation, and privy to the same cultural and behavioral context that you've researched.

When your team has information, it gives them the opportunity to add their own valuable insights. When we become deeply ingrained in an issue, it can be difficult to look at it objectively. So make sure your team is equipped with the same armory you have -- their perspective of it is an asset.

When it comes to preparing for any meeting, there are a few basic things you can do to prepare your team that also apply here.

- **Set clear ground rules:** Make sure your team actually understands what the problem is here, and what the most desired proposed solutions are. Also make sure they know when it's okay to contribute to the discussion, and what they should avoid bringing up.
- **Discuss non-negotiables:** Your colleagues should be aware of the If-Thens. Prepare them with a list of things for which your side is absolutely unable to compromise -- and let them know how to handle those objections.
- **Let them ask questions:** Now is the time to clear up any uncertainties. If your team is caught off-guard, it will probably show. That can make your side look unprepared, which lends power to your opponent.

Ready to get started?

If you do all of these fabulous things to prepare -- homework, research, introspection, and planning for less-than-desirable outcomes -- then please, feel good about the conversation you're about to have. We have a tendency to expect the worst (I know I do, anyway), and sometimes, numbers are the only thing that make us feel better.

So know this:

- With job offers, for example, 90% of employers have never, ever reneged because someone tried to negotiate.
- And 80% of students and grads -- the newbies! -- are at least somewhat successful when they negotiate.

I said it before, and I'll say it again: Negotiating is kind of scary. But even if the worst case scenario actually plays out, by following these steps, you'll be covered with a backup plan.