

10 Types of Difficult Prospects and How to Handle Them



Sales is a remarkably human profession. Your success or failure is directly tied to your ability to read and handle your prospects, and while some relationships will be smooth sailing, others will be rockier and require more finesse.

Every prospect is unique. But the majority of your prospects will fall into one of the 10 categories below. Read on to learn how to identify tricky customers and how you should handle them.

1) The Know-It-All

These prospects think they don't have anything to learn from you. Sometimes you'll encounter prospects who actually know a lot, but oftentimes you'll just be dealing with people who think they do. These prospects will talk a lot and can be hesitant to take recommendations or suggestions from you.

How to handle them: Figure out early exactly how stubborn your prospect is going to be. Are they just trying to impress you, or do they genuinely think they know better than you? How accurate is their knowledge?

How you deal with these prospects depends on their inclination. If they just want to get on with the process because they know what they need to know and are sold on your product, by all means run through the sales process more quickly and bring them on board. But if you're proactively reaching out and the prospect refuses to listen to you, let the relationship go. You'll never be able to effectively help people who don't want to be helped.

2) The DIYer

DIYers are information gatherers. They want to learn just enough about how your product works and what it does to be able to replicate the results themselves, either by creating their own hodgepodge of free tools or hacking together a similar process. They'll take up a lot of your time with a lot of questions, but never commit to purchasing.

How to handle them: Try to sell value over price. Often, DIYers are hesitant to pay for a solution because they don't have many resources at their disposal, so suss out their budget situation and see if there's wiggle room and they just need to be convinced that your product will be more effective than their own.

If they genuinely don't have the budget or can't be swayed, don't spend any more of your time on them. Send them some educational resources, but don't continue investing time into the relationship.

3) The Fan

Fans are similarly reluctant to commit to buying a product, but for more benign reasons. If your company's built up a significant brand presence, you're particularly likely to encounter these prospects. Maybe they've been following your content or social media for years, or are looking for a job, or are just excited about your product.

Whatever it is ... they don't really need your product, but they're either too nice or enthusiastic to say so.

How to handle them: You can detect fans in the discovery process. Ask questions designed to [uncover the business pain](#) that fits your product, and

if it turns out there isn't a fit, cut them loose. Of course, be nice about it -- while fans may never buy, they're still important to spreading positive word-of-mouth.

4) The Ghoster

These prospects commit to showing up to meetings and then ... don't. Maybe they've forgotten, maybe something else came up, or maybe they just didn't care that much about coming in the first place. Whatever their reasons for flaking, it's a sign that a conversation with you isn't one of their top priorities.

How to handle them: Before giving up, ask yourself if there's anything you could have done to prevent a no-show. Did you book a meeting for a specific purpose or just to "check in"? Did you send a confirmation email before the meeting? Did you follow up with them afterwards to try and reschedule?

Use these strategies from HubSpot sales rep Sam Belt to [prevent no-shows](#).

If none of them work, it means your prospect is disengaged from the sales process. Disqualify and move on.

5) The Busy Bee

These prospects want to talk to you, they really do, but they just have so much going on. Whether they're trying to get a new business off the ground or a jack-of-all-trades at a small company, many of your prospects will be juggling multiple competing priorities and won't always be able to put your first. Whether this manifests itself in no-shows or other missed commitments (e.g. not reading relevant materials before a meeting), it can be difficult to keep these prospects on track.

How to handle them: Find out what else is on their plate. Can your product help ease any of these initiatives? If you can help your prospect see how your product fits into the bigger picture of their business, you're more likely to convince them to expedite the process.

The other strategy you can try is to demonstrate how things will only get worse without your product. If your product will be key to growing the business or smoothing out growing pains, this is an especially compelling pitch to make.

6) The Other Salesperson

These prospects aren't actually prospects at all. Instead, they're reps at other companies who try to sell you by pretending to be an inbound lead. Yes, this happens -- although hopefully not frequently.

How to handle them: You can be a little more direct here. Salesperson to salesperson, let the other rep know that this behavior isn't acceptable.

7) The Traditionalist

Traditionalists are, as their name suggests, afraid of change. They're usually talking to you because they now they have a problem but are still skeptical that your solution is the best or that they really need to completely shake things up. Traditionalists might not think they're savvy enough to use your product, view your service as "a trend," or haven't reached their breaking point when it comes to their old strategies.

How to handle them: If they're 100% committed to keeping things the same, prospects probably won't take your call. So the fact that you're having a conversation at all is promising. Dig deep on the reasons they're having a conversation -- what used to work smoothly that is getting more difficult? What's stopped working altogether? What impact has this had on their business?

If you can make the conversation about fixing the gaping holes in their company and not about your shiny product, you'll have an easier time hooking these prospects.

It's also important to emphasize education here. Oftentimes, prospects are hesitant because they simply don't know enough to feel comfortable. Do the legwork to make them comfortable and familiar, and they'll be more likely to ink a deal.

8) The Waffler

“This sounds good, but ...” “I’d like to act today, but ...” “I’m not ready to make a call right now ...”

You’ll always encounter prospects who want and need your product, but for some reason just can’t pull the trigger. They’ll seem interested, then push back a meeting. Then they’ll say they don’t want to buy right now, but ask you to call back in a month. Wafflers are hard to nail down to a commitment.

How to handle them: Find out what’s causing the delays. Are there other projects competing for time and attention? Is a higher up stalling? Is your prospect simply unable to make a decision?

To move along a sales process, you have to convince your prospect that it’s important to act now. Use these 26 questions to [create a sense of urgency](#) and drive the sales process forward.

9) The Hardballer

This prospect aggressively negotiates for every discount they can get, citing competitor pricing and threatening to back out completely if you don’t meet their financial terms. They need and want your product ... they just don’t want to pay for it.

How to handle them: First of all, you have to know your company’s bottom line -- if your prospect isn’t budging from a number and that number is far below the deepest discount you’ll accept, walk away.

But more often, prospects push back on price because they don’t think the value justifies the associated number. Luckily, we’ve got your back: Check out these 24 [responses to the price objection](#) you can deploy in your next negotiation.

10) The Control Freak

Control freaks share many characteristics with Know-It-Alls, but instead of trying to be the expert on your product, they try to be the expert when it comes to the sales process. They want to run it themselves, and whether

it's wanting to skip several necessary steps or slow things to without a good reason, they want to be the one to call the shots.

How to handle them: You're the sales rep who's been through hundreds of sales processes, not your prospect. At the same time, you have to work for your prospect in the way that they're most comfortable with, so what you should do depends on how controlling they're being.

If they just want to run calls a certain way and you can accommodate that request without losing information you need to move forward, there's no real reason for you to push back. But if your prospect wants to skip important steps or unnecessarily drag things out, be upfront and explain exactly why things work the way they do. If they refuse to bend, you might have to walk away.

What kinds of difficult personalities have you encountered while selling?