



INTELLIGENT CONVERSATIONS

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A CANDID LETTER FROM YOUR PROSPECT

Dear Seller,

I only have a few minutes, but I understand you're interested in selling me something. If you ask me, that's pretty self-serving.

The truth is, you have no idea what my life is like. You may think you do, but you don't—and you need to if you want my business.

I got to the office early today so I could have some uninterrupted time to work. By 9 a.m., all my good intentions were dashed when a new issue popped up that I needed to deal with. I have no idea when I'll get everything done—especially with all the emails and phone calls I get each day.

In short, I have way too much to do, ever-increasing expectations, impossible deadlines and constant interruptions. Time is my most precious commodity, and I protect it at all costs.

That's why I live with the current situation or vendor as long as I can—even if I'm not happy with things. Why? Because change creates more work.

Which gets us back to you. Let me be blunt. I don't care about your product, service or solution.

When you send me an email, I quickly scan it looking for any self-promoting puffery. The minute it jumps out at me, you're zapped from my inbox. Same thing with voicemail.

I delete you just as fast. Delete, delete, delete.

I'm not always like this. Occasionally a savvy seller captures my attention, entices me to meet, shows me why I should change, and then makes it easy for me to work with them.

What are they doing? **Having intelligent conversations with me—about what matters. To me.**

Those savvy sellers are completely focused on my business. They know my most urgent priorities. We talk about what's relevant to me. They offer ideas, insights and information that matters.

They ask good questions too and help me figure out if it makes sense to do something different. That's what I care about!

If you focus on helping me achieve my objectives, I'll listen to you all day long. Give it a try, and you'll be amazed at the different reaction you'll get.

— Your Prospect



THE INTELLIGENT CONVERSATION FORMULA

In today's crazy-busy world, the ONLY way to capture and keep your prospects' attention is to talk with them about what matters to them. Pure and simple. That's all they care about.

Your prospects have zero tolerance for salespeople who think their job is to share their unique methodologies, great technology or extraordinary service. All that info is available online. If it's of interest, they'll find it—on their own time.

Forrester Research also found executives state that 86% of the salespeople who called on them were NOT prepared to have an intelligent conversation on their initial meetings. Most didn't get a second chance.

Yet your prospects are thirsty for ideas that can help

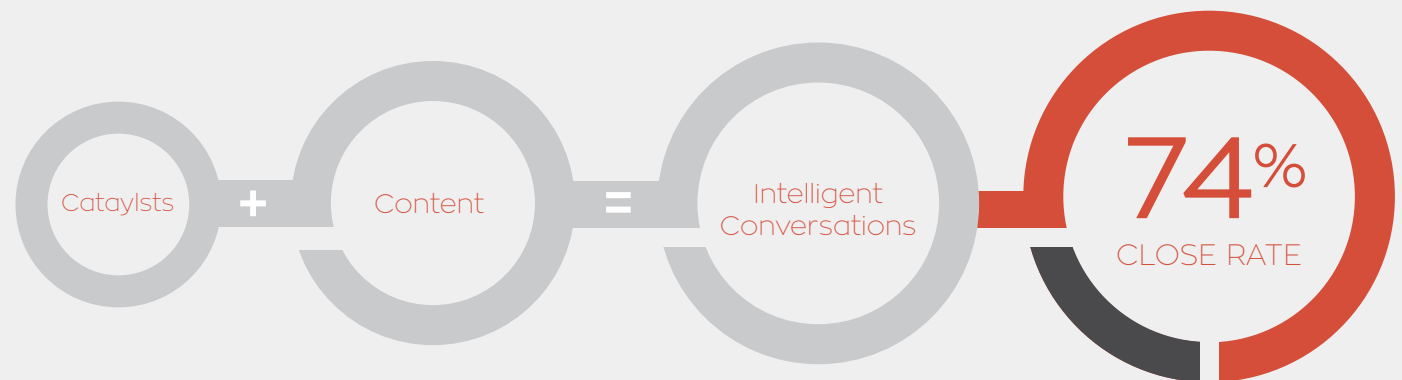
them do their job better, faster, or more productively. They crave information on how to increase revenue, reduce costs or expand their market presence. They search for insights on how to deal with changes in the business environment. A salesperson who delivers these ideas, insights and information is pure gold.

Additionally, Forrester Research shows that the first vendor to create a viable vision of the future has a 74% chance of closing the sale.

That's an amazing statistic, but entirely achievable IF you target the right prospects, research their business and talk with them about what matters most. In short, you need to use catalysts and context to lead an intelligent conversation.

THE FORMULA

Using this formula takes more prep time, but ultimately selling is a whole lot easier. You call on fewer people, work with them on a deeper level, build stronger relationships and win deals faster – often with minimal competition.



In the upcoming pages, we'll dig into each of these component parts in more depth.

CATALYSTS

According to Wikipedia, a catalyst “speeds up a reaction by lowering the activation energy required for the reaction to proceed.” In sales, a catalyst does the same thing. Suddenly the organization is receptive to new options. The grip of the status quo has been loosened. Money even appears out of thin air. Here’s how to find and leverage these trigger events for maximum impact at your company.

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“Real-time sales intelligence drive sales.
65% of Best-in-Class firms currently
deploy formal trigger event tools.”

— ABERDEEN RESEARCH

1. IDENTIFY THE CATALYSTS

To get started, analyze your existing clients. Ask yourself:

(1)...What internal factors (inside the company) made your clients finally decide to take action?

(2)...What external factors (outside the company) changed their business environment sufficiently so that the status quo was no longer sufficient?

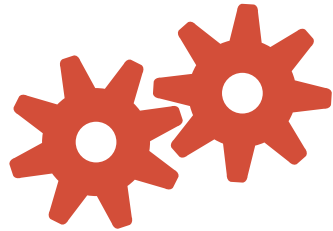
Often salespeople discover distinct changes or issues that are behind virtually all decisions. Invariably, these are the most common:

- **New Leadership:** Often, within 3-6 months, new executives are implementing fresh initiatives to drive revenue, reduce costs or increase efficiencies.
- **Financial Announcements:** If business is up, expansion projects take priority. If business is stagnant or down, productivity or cost-saving initiatives jump to the forefront.
- **Mergers/Acquisitions:** Any change in this area causes organizations to re-evaluate all their supplier relationships.
- **New Strategic Initiatives:** When new corporate directives are announced, the entire organization shifts to ensure they're in alignment.
- **Legal/Compliance:** Changes in government regulations (e.g. Affordable Care Act) cause organizations to take immediate action.

These are only some of the many catalyzing events that can create opportunities for savvy sellers. Others include reorganizations, new product/service announcements, relocations, market expansions, new business deals, or new funding.

If you're new to this type of thinking, review local or national business publications and ask yourself: "If this happens, how does this impact an organization's need for what I sell?"

Knowing your catalysts frees you to pursue those companies where you have a higher likelihood of closing an accelerated deal. Plus, you'll know what to talk to these prospects about since you are deeply immersed in their issues and challenges. It's the fodder you need to have an intelligent conversation.



2. GET A JUMP START ON COMPETITORS

Here's the good news. Many of these catalytic events are newsworthy announcements, shared publicly by the company. Or they're part of required financial reporting.

The easiest way to get your hands on this info is to leverage sales intelligence tools – ones that automatically search for your specific catalysts and deliver them to you on a timely basis. If you sell to a small number of companies or track a finite set of catalyzing events, you can get by with Google Alerts.

But things get pretty complicated when you need a steady stream of new prospects. Or when you're selling to multiple market segments. Or when a variety of these catalysts can signify a loosening of the status quo.

Sales intelligence apps like InsideView, Lead 411 or DiscoverOrg can totally automate this process for you. They sort through all the junk that's out there, giving you daily alerts about what's happening in your territory – on just those catalyzing agents that you want to follow.

Intelligent conversations depend on sales intelligence. Today, it's imperative to be the first one in the door with fresh insights on how to deal with the emerging priorities and issues.

Intelligent conversations
depend on sales
intelligence.



CONTEXT

Once you know which companies have just experienced a catalytic event, it's essential to learn more about the organization and its people. This contextual framework ensures relevancy and enables intelligent conversations.

With context, you understand your prospect's business direction and challenges better. You can talk their language and focus in on what matters. You'll be seen as a trusted advisor who's willing to invest time learning before "selling." Plus, you'll be able to customize messages and plan your meetings so that you're an irresistible force.

Make sure to check out the following areas before initiating contact, jumping on a virtual meeting or having an in-person sales call.

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To be seen as a trusted advisor today requires **context**—a deep understanding of your prospect, their market and business challenges.

1. COMPANY CONTEXT

Take a look at your prospect's website. What are they selling and to whom? How are their financials? What info can you find about their current direction, strategic initiatives and more?

Check out the company's LinkedIn profile too. See what they're sharing from a social media perspective. Take a look at their competitors' profile and read any review sites.

Again, you're trying to get grounded in what's happening there, right now. It is the context from which all your conversations will be evaluated.

Your goal is to find 3-5 connection points that can help you set up meetings and have intelligent conversations.



2. PEOPLE CONTEXT

Use LinkedIn to scout out whom to contact. According to CEB, an average of 5.4 people are involved in decisions today. You can even create an account map, to give you a better picture of all the individuals who might be involved.

Next, study their profiles. What's important to these people? What are their objectives, issues, challenges and needs? Do you have any mutual interests or colleagues? What's their career history and trajectory? Check out their social profiles/posts on Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites. This is where you'll find deeper insights into who they are as individuals.

Your goal is to find 3-5 connection points that can help you set up meetings and have intelligent conversations. You might even choose to initiate conversations via these various social media outlets. Connecting this way often bypasses the clutter of the overflowing inbox.

3. DIGITAL CONTEXT

Today, many companies leverage marketing automation systems (e.g., HubSpot) combined with educational content to attract potential buyers into their ecosystem. The data that's collected provides a rich source of insight into what matters to your prospects.

Before contacting prospects, check to see their “relationship” to your company. Has anyone downloaded any ebooks or signed up for a webinar? Have they visited other pages of your website? How many—and what are they interested in? Are they already a customer? If so, what can you learn about their lifetime interactions with your organization?

Technologies like HubSpot Sales, YesWare and ToutApp can tell you who's opened your email, if it's been forwarded to others, if attachments were opened and more. Other apps (e.g., VisiStat) can identify who's visiting your website in stealth mode, enabling you to proactively reach out—with knowledge.

The goal of all this research is to figure out what kind of issues, needs and challenges an organization or individual faces before you're actually in a conversation. It's also about understanding how they've already interacted with your company—thus giving you more insight into what matters.

Understanding this context enables you to plan a relevant strategy for setting up meetings as well as holding intelligent conversations once you're there. With even a quick deep dive into the above, you'll be better prepared than 90% of your contemporaries.



The goal of this research is to figure out what kind of issues, needs and challenges an organization or individual faces before you're actually in a conversation.



INTELLIGENT CONVERSATIONS

Planning an intelligent conversation involves combining what you know about the catalyst's impact with your understanding of the context of prospect's situation.

From this, you develop a game plan to pique your prospect's curiosity, showcase your depth of knowledge and build trust that you're an invaluable resource.

You'll know you've succeeded, if, at the end of your conversation, your prospect says, "Very interesting. We clearly need to look at this in greater depth."

In the upcoming pages you'll find five steps to make that happen.

1. START WITH “IF-THEN” THINKING

When you leverage catalytic events for prospecting, begin your planning process with “If-then” thinking. These are suppositions that are based on your company’s experience working with other similar firms. While you can’t be sure that they’re true, there’s a decent likelihood that they are.

For example, say your company does website design. IF you uncover a company that’s just received venture funding (catalyst), THEN it’s highly likely:

- They’re planning on scaling growth.
- Marketing has a real uphill battle in generating demand for their offering.
- Implementing online lead generation initiatives could help.
- Your best initial contact would be the CMO (chief marketing officer).

Yes, you’re making assumptions, but they’re grounded in fact. The next step is to figure out your meeting plan—one that guarantees you have an intelligent conversation with your prospect.



The ultimate goal of this dialog is to have your prospect say, “Very interesting. We clearly need to look at this in greater depth.”

2. FIND/PREP RELEVANT EXAMPLES

To quickly establish credibility, share a relevant story about a similar client. But don't expect the perfect story to pop into your mind when you need it. Instead, plan and practice your examples before your conversation.

The most effective stories begin by with explaining your existing client's situation before your company worked with them. Emphasize the key problems, issues or challenges that the decision maker faced with their old way of doing things. After hearing this, your prospect should say, "Mmm. Sounds just like what we're dealing with."

Then give a very brief (1-2 sentence) overview of what your company did with them. Finally, highlight the results they got from working with you. Metrics help, as do time frames. Make sure you tell your story aloud multiple times before your meeting.

3. PLAN YOUR INTRO

Kick off your meeting in a way that shows you've (a) done your homework and (b) have worked on similar issues/challenges before. Start by mentioning the catalyst. After all, it's why you reached out in the first place.

"Terry, as I said in my email, I see that your company recently received venture funding. Congrats. It's a big deal. But I also know, from working with other CMOs in your position, that you're likely faced with a couple big challenges: (1) No one knows you exist; and (2) Your marketing budget isn't nearly enough for everything you'd like to do. Right?"

This makes you sound credible. You might also want to talk about some of the other info you discovered in your research. Then share your customer story. Doing this early in the conversation generates interest and serves as the foundation for your questions.

4. CRAFT KILLER QUESTIONS

Intelligent conversations are business conversations, based on your understanding of your prospect's recent catalytic event as well as their business, personal and digital context. You need to lead the conversation, ensuring it's relevant to your prospect.

Map out your questions in advance, leveraging any research you've done, ideas you have or information your prospect might find valuable. Also plan several questions to get your prospect thinking.

Continuing with the above venture funding example, here are some questions you could ask if you were selling website services:

- In working with other CMOs who face this growth challenge, typically their top three priorities are: 1) __; 2) __ and 3) __. Which is most important at your company?
- In reviewing your website, I noticed you don't have a lot of ways to capture email addresses of site visitors. Since the Business Journal article mentioned some of the funding was earmarked for Marketing, I suspect you have plans to ramp up in this area?
- Recently you tweeted, "Aargh! The challenges of attracting enterprise clients when you're the new kid on the block." What are your current strategies in this area--and how does your website fit into your plans?
- Based on my quick analysis of your website, it looks like there are several primary areas for improvement: 1) __; 2) __ and 3) __. From your perspective, which do you think would deliver the most value and why?
- I noticed that after we set up our meeting, you downloaded an ebook from our website. What's happening right now in your company that specifically prompted your interest in this topic?



Questions put your customer at the center of the conversation. Intelligent questions promote trust.

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As you can see, having an intelligent conversation requires you to really think about what you're doing. You can't wing it. You have to orchestrate it.

You can't just pull out a list of questions and run through them like it's a pop quiz either. You have to be genuinely curious and interested in what your prospects have to say. When they know you care, they'll share even more.

5. SUGGEST THE LOGICAL NEXT STEP

The goal of an initial meeting is a second meeting. Your first intelligent conversation should logically lead you to another. And, it's your job to plant the seed. Again, take a leadership role. Suggest what the next step is based on your experience in working with similar projects. You might say:

"As I mentioned Terry, we help lots of growing companies turn their website into a lead generation hub. Prior to our meeting, I did as much research on your situation as I could. Now, I know more specifics.

"Doing something with your website is going to be crucial for you to meet your growth objectives. But before I share any recommendations, it's absolutely essential to get Sales and IT involved. Let's set up a follow-up conversation next week."

Please note, you're not talking about your product or service. It's too early to do so. Your initial conversation needs to be about business. Because your prospect had a catalytic event, they're much more open to change than they were before. But there still has to be a valid business reason for them to do it.

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From your prospect's perspective, an intelligent conversation is a business conversation.

MOVING FORWARD

Let's go back to where we started. According to Forrester Research, the first vendor to create a viable vision of the future has a 74% chance of closing the sale. That means you need to identify a gap between your prospect's business goals and their current situation.

When companies are disrupted by catalytic events, a gap naturally emerges. Suddenly the status quo is no longer sufficient. Change is needed.

Salespeople who use sales intelligence apps to notify them when these trigger events occur consistently outperform their peers. They get in early, which gives them the ability to shape the discussion.

When these same salespeople leverage context, they integrate their knowledge of the company, individual people and their digital behavior into the conversation. They know more—which enables them to come up with better ways to help their prospects achieve their specific goals.

Combined, catalysts and context yield intelligent conversations – ones that are focused on helping prospects create a viable vision of what's possible in their organization. In this ebook, we've just talked about the initial conversation. You'll need more to close the deal. But you'll get there faster and with minimal competition. It's definitely the way to sell today.

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ABOUT JILL KONRATH

Jill Konrath is a globally recognized sales strategist. She's an in-demand speaker at sales kick-off meetings and conferences where she shares fresh strategies to help salespeople deal with emerging challenges.

Jill is the bestselling author of four books: **More Sales, Less Time**, **SNAP Selling**, **Selling to Big Companies** and **Agile Selling**. With over 1/4 million LinkedIn followers and 140,000 blog readers, her advice is impacting sellers worldwide.

To bring Jill in to speak at your upcoming event, contact her via email: jill@jillkonrath.com or phone: 651-429-1922



PARTIAL CLIENT LIST

