

Open ended questions

Introduction

This article is part of our [sales guide for contractors](#).

As a contractor trying to secure a contract, asking open ended questions is key to your fact finding, so you can tailor your sales approach accordingly.

This article will teach you the basics of asking and dealing with open ended questions.

Importance of Questions

One of the most important aspects of sales is asking the right questions of your customer. If you don't ask questions, you are merely guessing as to the needs and desires of the person you are selling to.

The whole point of asking the questions of your customer is the fact that the answers to these questions will tell you how to pitch your product or service. These answers will indicate to you which points to cover, and which to leave out.

By asking the right questions, you can control the dialogue and guide your customer into a closing situation where you can ask for the business, having covered all the necessary points.

As a contractor, when you speak to agents over the phone you will quickly need to establish what the client is looking for and then convince the agent that you are perfect for the role. When you reach an interview you will need to do the same with the client.

Open and Closed Questions

So how do we do this? Well, in a selling situation, we need to allow our customer to open up to you and give you the clues and insights into what will make them buy. This is achieved largely by using a technique called 'open ended questions'. The opposite of an open ended question is a 'closed question'.

Let's look at an example of both, for example, when a recruitment consultant is pitching a new contract to you:

Open ended question: 'What type of role are you looking for?'

Closed question: 'Would you consider a role for £20 per hour?'

The major difference between these two questions is that one of the questions can be answered with a 'one word answer', or more dangerously with the answer 'no!' That question was of course the closed question. The open ended question does not allow you to say 'yes' or 'no', it makes you start opening up.

With the closed question, the recruitment consultant may have lost the chance to place the contractor. It may have been the case that the contract being offered did not offer the best income, but perhaps the skills being used in this contract may have been of particular interest to the contractor. So, they may have considered the contract, but have already said 'no', and so the opportunity is lost.

Coping with Open Ended Questions

You will almost certainly have experienced telesales representatives attempting to sell you all kinds of products over the phone, even at home in the evenings. A well trained sales person will always attempt to make you open up and start talking about yourself with open ended questions. A poor sales person will simply ask something like 'are you interested in double glazing', to which you reply, quite simply - 'no'!

Understanding and recognizing open ended questions can help you to make people open up, and can also help you to deal with irritating sales people. The next time someone contacts you, introduces themselves as someone you don't know and then asks an open ended question, you have the ability to stop the sales person from controlling the dialogue. Rather than answering the question (be aware that there is no law that says you must answer questions of sales people), be direct and say: 'stop, what are you selling?'

This is likely to put the sales person off their stride as at this stage, they do not want you to know the nature of the call. First they want to lure you in a little further before presenting their product or solution to a problem you were not even aware that you had! The sales person's answer to the direct question of 'what are you selling' will often again not be a straight answer. So, ask again until the sales person tells you what they are selling. Now, you have more control over the conversation.

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As a contractor you will need to deal with open ended questions that the agent asks you, that perhaps you do not want to answer. For example, "[what is the lowest rate you will accept?](#)". You will also need to learn how to ask open ended questions to gain as much information as you can in order to tailor your responses to maximise your sales pitch, from securing an interview all the way through to negotiating the rate and terms and conditions of your contract.

Using Closed Questions

There is a place for the closed question. Once the sales person has completed asking their open ended questions and extracted the information they need from you, they can then pitch their product and deal with any objections you might have (see section on '[Objections and objection handling](#)').

It is then time for the 'close', see section on '[Closing – the theory and practices](#)'. A close can certainly be a closed question like 'would you like to order the product?'.

Summary

Open ended and closed ended questions are certainly not new and are found in many aspects of life. We have all attended dinner parties where you sit next to the boring guest who answers all of your questions with one word answers. The antidote to this guest is of course the open ended question. You can with practice learn to ask questions that do not allow a person to simply say 'yes' or 'no'. You can also spot an open ended question when you hear one and stop the sales person in their tracks.

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