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How people *really* buy


 by [Andrea Howe](#)

 Category : [Weekly tips](#)

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This post is part of our [Weekly Tips](#) series.

I owe this tip to my co-author, [Charlie Green](#), and the great thinking he's done on how buyers actually buy professional services.



It sounds obvious: [almost all buying of services happens in a two-step process, screening and selection](#). Ho hum, two steps, you already know this, right? Here's the catch: most people in professional services make a critical mistake with these two "simple" steps.

The screening step answers the question, "*Can they do it?*" Answering it is a largely analytical process that requires research but very little direct interaction. Buyers collect data about you and other providers: expertise, scale, geography, and more. They mostly judge *your organization* by the more rational and logical variables of [the trust equation](#): credibility and reliability. They create a short list of providers who move onto the selection step.

The selection step answers a very different question: "*Do we want to work with them?*" It's a much more emotional question, even though buyers may not realize it (or admit it publicly). Answering it requires personal interactions, where buyers are mostly judging the *people in your organization* by the more emotional and psychological variables of the trust equation: [intimacy](#) and [self-orientation](#). You don't emerge from the selection process on top because of competence; you get there because of *fit*.

When you move from screening to selection, it gets personal. That big mistake most people in professional services make? Treating the more personal selection

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step as if you're still in the more analytical screening step. You continue to market your organization, rather than selling the people in it.

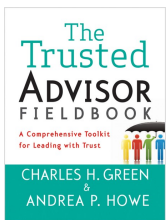
Here's a test: Open the PowerPoint deck you used in your last oral proposal. Are your opening slides all about you: your expertise, scale, geography, and more? If so, you're leading with your qualifications, despite the fact that you've already passed the screening process. Even if your buyer starts off with, "So, tell us about your firm" ... *don't*. Turn the conversation to them. Be open, honest, curious, passionate. Give them an experience of you, not a recitation of your expertise. Treat the oral proposal like the first meeting *after* you've won the job.

It's kind of like dating. Does your dinner companion want to hear how great you were on your last 17 dates? No. And neither does your client.

Make It Real

This week, practice a 60-second response when people ask you to tell them more about you. Or better yet, start with, "What would you like to know?" and then keep it brief and other-focused. What happens when they're a more active part of the conversation?

Learn More



Read more about [whether people buy the consulting firm or the people in it](#), courtesy of our friends at Trusted Advisor Associates, or refresh on ways to "ditch the pitch" in Chapter 13 of [The Trusted Advisor Fieldbook](#).

Bio

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As the founder of The Get Real Project, I am the steward of our vision and our service offerings, as well as a workshop leader and keynote speaker. Above all else, I am an entrepreneur on a mission: to kick conventional business wisdom to the curb and transform how people work together as a result. I am also the co-author, with Charles H. Green, of *The Trusted Advisor Fieldbook* (Wiley, 2012).

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