THIRD-PARTY VALIDATION

Social proof:
What is it and why does it matter?

3-min read

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Human beings are social animals, and although we like to think that we are unique individuals making rational decisions, the truth is that we are heavily influenced by social proof, i.e., other people's choices. This is particularly the case when we admire and identify with those other people.

Marketeers regularly use this mechanism to influence our choices. When you see a travel operator claiming that **"92% of customers would choose to book with us again"** or devoting a section of their website to **"Trending Destinations"**, that's social proof at work. And, slightly more subtly, that's why you often see a button marked **"Frequently bought together"** underneath the details of a product you clicked on.

The concept is far from new: it was identified formally as an important influencing tool in the mid-1980s, based on experiments that went all the way back to the 1930s. These showed that social proof is particularly powerful when:

• We are uncertain of our own choices.
• We perceive the group providing social proof to be similar to ourselves.

The choices that our friends make are especially important: we're twice as likely to pay attention to recommendations from friends than recommendations from other sources. But other forms of social proof – approval from acknowledged experts, customer testimonials, user reviews, even celebrity endorsements – all have an impact.

So how can we use social proof in a sales setting? We might be tempted to think we just need to email over a case study as part of presenting the value of our offer, but in fact, we should be using social proof consciously throughout the entire sales cycle.

Prospecting

Framed questions within your qualification criteria will unearth the real deal to qualify prospects in or out of the sales process.

> "We've run a number of projects for customers in your industry sector, and the common denominator is often X...
> What's your biggest challenge facing X?"

> "We've run a number of projects for people in your role, and the common denominator is often Y…
> What's your biggest challenge facing Y?"

Qualifying

Framed questions within your qualification criteria will unearth the real deal to qualify prospects in or out of the sales process.

> "Clients whom we've helped with similar projects have a defined internal process when making a decision; what are the steps you and your organisation need to take to get this project live?"

Delivering a proposal

Use existing customer feedback that showcases the benefits they received from your solution. Quantify the benefits wherever you can. Use direct customer quotations to make the social proof compelling.

Objection handling

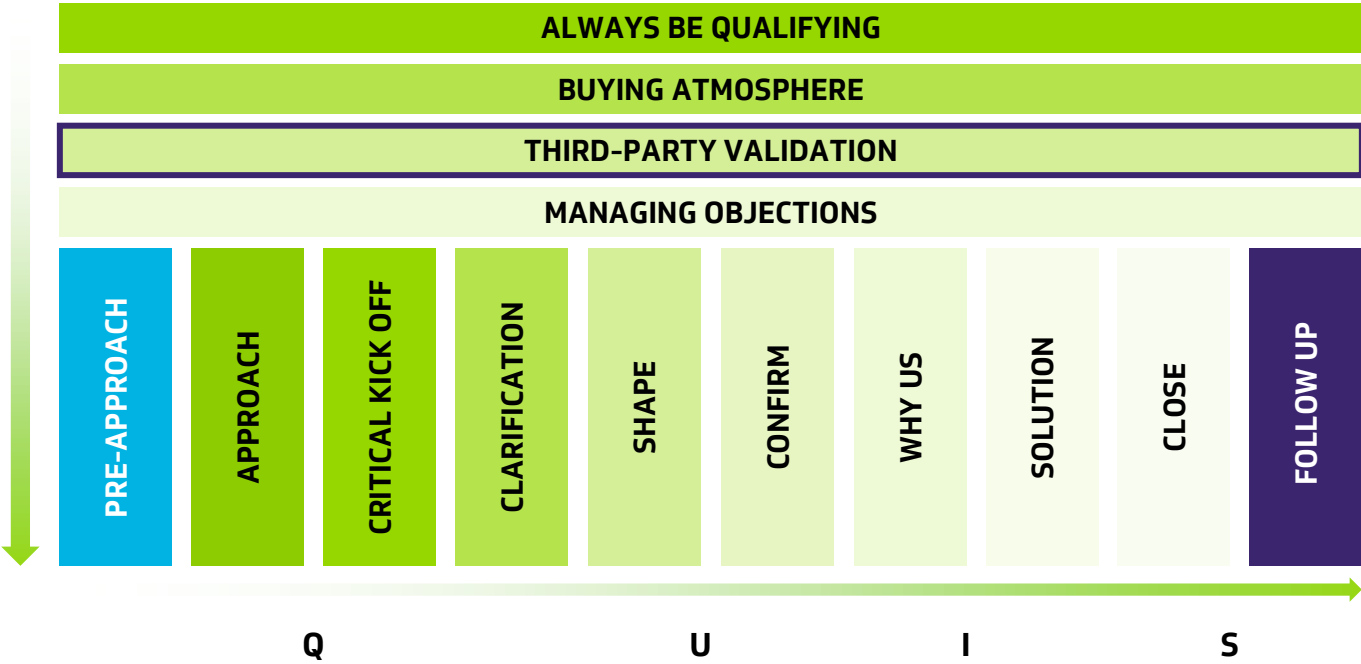Use the 'Feel, Felt and Found' methodology to refer to relevant social proof.

> "I completely understand where you are coming from, **in fact, other clients have felt the same way,** but what we have found is…"

Deal closing

Have existing clients provide reference calls / emails for you as part of the deal closure process. The more similar the reference client is to your prospect – in terms of both industry sector and role – the more powerful their social proof impact will be.

SBR Consulting's proven sales methodology, QUIS™, refers to social proof using the term third-party validation. As shown on the next page, the use of third-party validation is emphasised not only throughout the sales process but actually throughout the entire sales engagement.

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SBR Consulting's proven sales methodology, QUIS™

ALWAYS BE QUALIFYING

BUYING ATMOSPHERE

THIRD-PARTY VALIDATION

MANAGING OBJECTIONS

PRE-APPROACH	APPROACH	CRITICAL KICK OFF	CLARIFICATION	SHAPE	CONFIRM	WHY US	SOLUTION	CLOSE	FOLLOW UP

Q **U** **I** **S**

In any market setting, we know that Social Proof is especially important to our clients. Using it appropriately can help fill your funnel, cut your sales cycle length, and improve your win rate.

To discover more about building your sales methodology, let's talk growth.

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