

Land That Big Deal

By Janet Gregory

Big deals don't happen by luck or by "being in the right place at the right time." It requires preparation, planning and some good old fashioned sales skills. Landing those big deals is a lot like landing an airplane. It starts with you (the pilot-in-command), a stabilized approach, on the right glide path, aligned with the runway at the proper speed – all the way to touchdown.

You are the pilot-in-command. Your company could sell to lots of big customers but not all big customers are right for your offering. Focus your selling efforts on customers that best fit your product and service offering. Look for customers with a profile that indicates there is **need**. Customer need fuels your aircraft engine. Look for high octane need; it will propel your win. Customer need is often obvious and you will find yourself in big deals with lots of competition. Think in three dimensions: 1) think outside-the-box; 2) look for customer need in less obvious forms ... like early adopters, edge players and up-and-coming fast growing companies; 3) look beyond big annual revenues in known industry players for answers to some new qualifying questions:

- Which companies reward employees for performance in business areas that you impact?
- Which companies look to differentiate themselves within their marketplace or industry?
- Do the prospect company's values and business philosophy align with those of your organization?
- Can you really help the prospect achieve competitive advantage?

Start with a stabilized approach. Get your sales process lined up for a smooth landing before you even take off. What? Yes, that's right, do your homework. Know everything you can about the big-deal before you make the first call. Spend time researching the company:

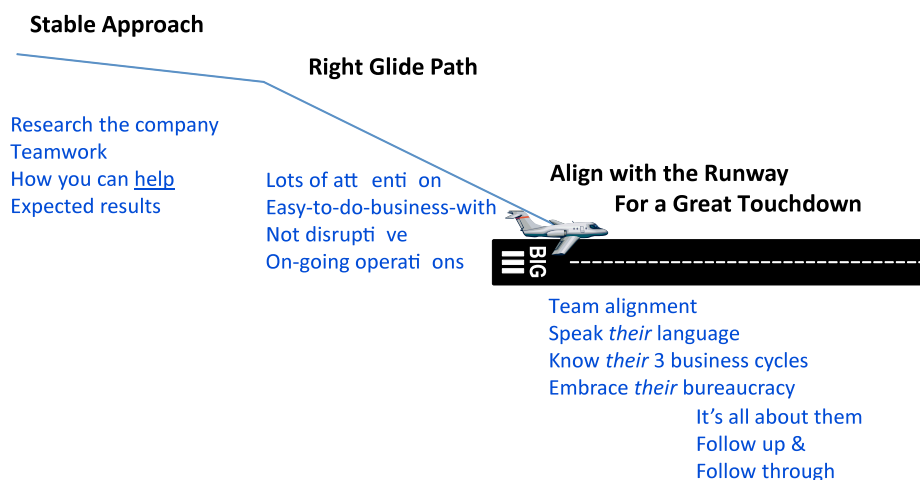
- Online – look for recent partnership announcements, industry trends (theirs, not yours), hiring & firing, blogs, rumors and internal company initiatives (recent annual reports are a good source).
- Talk with current or past employees of the big-deal company – look for unofficial business drivers, company style, early adopter behavior and unspoken deal killers.
- Talk with colleagues in other businesses that have sold to them – look for insight into informal decision making, risk tolerance, bureaucracy and competitive behavior.

Teamwork starts early when going after the big-deals. Build allies for your big-deal sales effort by *asking advice* from your manager, the deal desk, customer support and marketing. Build confidence with your prospect by showing them *how you can help*, not showing them how you sell. Big-deals want to know how you can help based on your company past experience, case studies, reference customers, and processes that aligns with theirs. In the early stages of the sales process spend time on *how* you do

things and the *results*, not on what you are selling. Your goal is not closing a deal; your goal is a long term partnership. Illustrate to the customer that you have the same vision that they do. Whether you are a big company or a small one; let your big-deal prospect know that you understand their needs and business process.

Get on the right glide path. Big-deals expect a lot of attention. They are big-deals and they know it. That doesn't mean that you drop everything and ask "how high" when they say "jump." Busy, important people like to work with busy, important people and it is the same with companies. Provide them with lots of attention but let them know that your time and the time of your team is important as well.

Big-deals like to work with companies that are easy to do business with. Know that their interpretation of easy-to-do-business-with is different from yours. They think it means that you know *their* process, both formal and informal. This is where the research you did for a stabilized approach really comes in handy. A big-deal looks beyond the buying decision when *they* think of easy-to-do-business-with; they want to know that on-going operations will be smooth and that implementation will not be disruptive. The buying decision is just an enabler to getting there. Expand your big-deal contacts to involve key people and departments that will be part of ongoing operations and implementation. They don't make the buying decision but they can stop it instantly (and often do). Thinking differently will help you sell the big-deal. Remember, the buying decision is not important to them. Yes, the buying decision is important to you ... you think about it, talk about it and forecast it. But, the buying decision is not important to them; it is just an enabler so they can get what they want. Help them see what they want ... which is your on-going operations and business relationship.



For a great landing, align with the runway at the proper speed – all the way to touchdown. As the relationship with your big-deal develops get everyone involved, align resources on your team with resources on their team. Big-deals are team efforts from executive to manager to accounting to operations to customer service. Speak their language. Talk about the on-going operations and business relationship using their terminology, not yours. As you are aligning resources on your team, help them with the translations so that they can also speak the customer's language. At a big-deal the team will also include third-party partners. The big-deal wants to do business with you and they are already doing business with other vendors. Big-deals recognize and respect the expertise of partners as an extension of their own team. The big-deal wants you to work effectively with their other partners. Involve other

big-deal partners in your team efforts where and when appropriate. Know where the other partners fit into the big-deal ongoing operations so that you can leverage them when needed.

Are you flying the plane or is the plane flying you? Truth is that it is a little of both. You are trying to drive the deal *and* you are riding the business cycle wave. Know the big-deal's business cycles. There are three business cycles to be aware of. The obvious one is budget cycle. Every company does budgets and budget updates. Do you fit into this budget cycle or does it need to be approved for next budget season? The two less obvious and equally important business cycles are the action season and the no-fly zone. The action season is the time of year when implementation, testing and integration of projects similar to yours are least disruptive to the business. The no-fly zone is the time of year when their core business is operating at full speed and does not want any distraction from its core mission. Identify these three critical business cycles and you will be able to land the big-deal with a smooth touchdown.

Embrace their bureaucracy. Yikes! We all hate red tape but fighting the red-tape is guaranteed to get you caught in it. Bureaucracy is part of what keeps a company running, especially a big-deal company. The key is to figure out how the bureaucracy works and work it to your advantage. In spirit, bureaucracy is in place to minimize risk and avoid mistakes. Proposals, decisions and action plans are channeled through a series of filters to assess quality, cost and impact. Yes, it slows things down and it also ensures that things are being done correctly, according to the big-deal's process. Knowing this helps you align with their style of operation. Work the bureaucracy in parallel with your approach, get an early start, involve key connections in your team and build the necessary elements into your process. Even your key big-deal contact hates working with internal red tape. Make your company easy-to-do-business-with by involving their necessary bureaucracy early in the process.

Touchdown. Landing the big-deal is anti-climactic. No fireworks. No champagne corks popping. Landing the big-deal is the natural result of a stabilized approach on the right glide path aligned with the runway. But, the satisfaction is big. There will be many more good landings as this long-term relationship unfolds over the months and years ahead. Landing the big deal is really just the beginning. It is the beginning of the big-deal customer getting what they really want, which is your solution to their problems. It is also the beginning of you getting a great long term relationship. You are pilot-in-command all the way. Follow up and follow through to ensure great follow through from delivery to implementation to on-going operations. You set the customer expectations; now make sure that you and your team delivers.

"Every good landing begins with a good approach" is a common point of discussion among pilots. I recently got my private pilot's license and realized that the parallel in selling big-deals was remarkable. There are also some good sales books that will help you examine various aspects of big-deal selling, here are a two on my recent reading list:

- "Counter-Intuitive Selling: Mastering the Art of the Unexpected" by Bill Byron Concevitch
- "Bag the Elephant: How to Win & Keep Big Customers" by Steve Kaplan

Wishing you many great landings!

Janet Gregory is a veteran sales executive and co-founder of KickStart Alliance. For assistance with sales strategy, sales planning, training, sales enablement, compensation or any aspect of sales operations, contact [Janet](#). Janet leads the sales readiness practice at KickStart Alliance. For help in aligning sales & marketing for results contact any member of the [KickStart Alliance team](#).