

**What is consultative selling?**

- Consultative selling, or solutions selling, is a technique used by big companies for complex sales. However, it can be used by SMEs for business-to-business (B2B) or even business-to-consumer (B2C) selling. The essence is to go beyond the stated requirement to understand your prospects' needs and explain how your product or service meets those needs better than anyone else's.

**Preparation:**

- Research on the customer (for B2B - turnover, growth, products, stated aims, stated strategies, culture and strengths. For B2C – the benefits your various customer types are looking for);
- Research on the market (emerging trends, main players, size, growing/shrinking, macro-economic factors eg is the market driven by the housing market or unemployment);

**Set the scene:**

- For planned meetings send an agenda/have a pre-meeting telephone call that sets the expectation that you are interested in how your product or service can help the prospect achieve their aims – you are not turning up to talk about features or technology
- For unplanned (eg in a shop) make sure you have a script that engages the prospect in a discussion about their needs

**The discussion:**

- For B2B, set out to understand the following things:
  - o What the company produces
  - o How many/how much they produce
  - o What is important to their customers
  - o What is their USP?
  - o How do they get the best from their staff?
  - o What are the top three challenges they are facing?
- For B2C, set out to understand the experience they are seeking
  - o In a shoe shop, don't ask "Can I help you?" ask "Are you looking for shoes with a special event in mind?"
  - o If someone rings about a new carpet ask them "What does the room feel like?" or "What atmosphere are you trying to create?"
- Explore with open questions (that require a descriptive answer) and confirm your understanding with closed questions (that can be answered Yes or No)
- Listen, listen, listen
- Explain to them how your product or service helps them achieve this
  - o Point by point match benefit to need
  - o Use their own language
  - o Don't assume they will recognise all the benefits you are offering without you telling them