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## Question Your Customer?

*What could be more meaningful and less expensive than sitting down with (your customer) in his or her office and speaking with them about their business?*

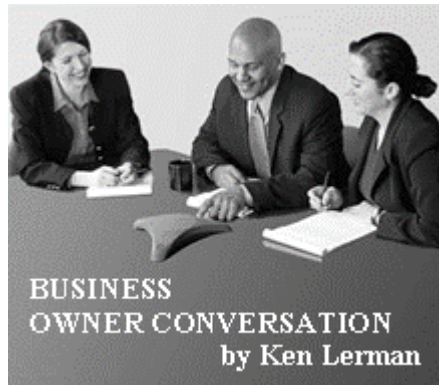
From the June, 2009 issue of *East Wichita News*  
by Ken Lerman

Hope won't get it. Successful business creates its own opportunities rather than hoping for better times. To participate in any stimulated economy or business opportunity, your business must continue to plan and move forward in a competitive direction.

Customer-client dialogues are at the heart of newer, more creative revenue-driven selling strategies. All business owners should be engaging and learning frequently from their customers first-hand what is important, or becoming more important, to primary purchase decision-makers.

A few years back, marketing/selling/product research (today termed "analytics") was part of active smart Brand Management. Now it is often a part of "CRM," Customer Relationship Management. As I work with my clients I find that the phrase "Collaborative Value Added Strategies" or "CVAS" is broader, carries more meaning, and in execution provides greater direct benefit to both the buyer and seller.

A most intelligent and successful business owner acquaintance and I were talking about CVAS when he mentioned, "I visit my top 10 accounts every year." The moment he shared this, I could sense he knew what my response would be. "Why don't you visit with your better small and mid-size clients



as well? Your business can help them grow into a stronger account, and they will appreciate your business for the support."

The following scenarios and questionnaire outlines might assist you in customizing a dialogue between you and your clients/customers.

### ***The Value-Added Interview***

It is very appropriate and "good business" for a supplier owner to call on the customer owner to identify current and new "value-added" and thereby strengthen and refresh the relationship.

What could be more meaningful and less expensive than sitting down with the owner in his or her office and speaking with them about their business? As a third party, I've often held these interviews for clients with excellent results. Following the thank yous and introduction, begin by asking:

- 1) Beyond price, what do you currently need or value from a (commercial printer, prototype developer, leasing company, etc.) that will significantly help you in building your business performance?

- 2) What trends do you see within your industry that will help or harm you?
- 3) How do you view my business as a supplier and as a business partner? What worked? What hasn't worked?
- 4) What do other suppliers offer you that is working well for you? What hasn't worked well?
- 5) How might we become more valuable to you? What products, solutions, or performance activity might add value to our relationship with you?
- 6) Thank you for your time. Let's get together again soon. I would enjoy showing you Wichita. Please visit us.

*NOTE:* Just by taking the time to visit your clients and showing them your interest by asking direct questions, you are demonstrating your value added as their supplier. Follow up in 48 hours with a thank you letter acknowledging the key points of what you learned. This is Marketing After the Sale!

If you are a B2B supplier, sit down with the client's purchasing director/manager and say:

"I am here to listen. We want to get it right, first-hand from you. I am not here to sell, argue or debate, I am here to learn. Will you please speak with me?"

Sue, how can we perform better for you specifically? Please speak directly. What can my business do for your business beyond what we provide your business today?

Sue, here is what we will offer you or be doing differently in 2010. Will this new activity/solution be a significant benefit to your business?

Sue, what new activities, products, or customers will you be pursuing in 2010? 2011? Might I, or my company, assist you in planning or carrying out these efforts for your new business activity?

Thank you, Sue, for this direction. Please allow me to summarize and give some clarity to my understanding of what you've just shared with me.

On Value-Added Interviews, you must listen carefully and limit your comments to learning more about your customer and how you can further assist them. You are not there to sell. You are there to learn.

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