

## Maintenance - A Competitive Differentiator

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### Do Any of These sound familiar?

- "Maintenance negotiations are consuming more of my time during the sales cycle."
- "I have to carve (the dreaded "C" word) discounts out of my license commissions which means less money in my pocket."
- "Even if I *knew* what our maintenance competitive differentiators were, I'm not sure I'd know how or when to use them."

If any of these do sound familiar, then you're not alone. These are just a few of the key trends we have seen with our clients over the past two years.

### But, but, but.....

So why *don't* companies use maintenance as a competitive differentiator? Based on what we've heard from sales executives, typical answers include:

- "We don't know/have a value for maintenance story" or
- "I don't want to bring up a controversial topic during the sales cycle" or
- "I don't get paid on maintenance, so I don't spend time on it."

Well, guess what? If you don't spend time addressing maintenance, your prospect/customer will. Worse yet, your competition is in a position to use maintenance as a weapon against you.

### Offensive vs. Defensive

In the past, most companies have been able to dodge incoming maintenance "skuds" by simply reacting to the occasional maintenance objections raised and praying they would go away. Maybe that worked in the old days, but times have changed. We have heard from several VP's of Sales that maintenance is commanding up to 70%-80% of negotiations. This means that being reactive just won't work any more. You *must* take an offensive strategy.

### How to Take the Offensive

1. **Know your "value for maintenance" story** – keep it crisp, compelling, conversational, and most of all, *customer-focused*.
2. **Pitch your maintenance story early and often** – no one is asking you to lead with your chin, but use maintenance to strengthen your overall solution.

3. **Set maintenance traps for your competitor** – Don't you just love the visual of your competitor getting that "deer in headlights" look when asked about *their* maintenance differentiators?
4. **Preempt traps set by your competitors** – they are fun to set, but don't get caught in one yourself. Make sure you bring maintenance up before your competitor does.
5. **Anticipate objections** – You know you are going to get them, so prepare! Make this part of your call plan process.

The bottom line is that ignoring maintenance is like pretending that the big red elephant isn't in the room when your prospects and your competition all know it is. Face it squarely on, smile, pitch your maintenance strengths and differentiators, and watch the competition squirm.