



## GET DECISION-MAKERS TOGETHER

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IN MOST COMPANIES, especially larger ones, there is no single decision-maker. Even the top boss needs to consult other people in the management team. Salespeople often try to get all the decision-makers together for a presentation, but in practice this is usually impossible: senior people have busy diaries, and are certainly not going to inconvenience themselves for the purpose of being sold to. Key-account salespeople therefore have to talk to the various decision-makers individually, and hope that when they do talk to each other (usually without the salesperson being present) they will agree to go ahead and buy.

In many cases, people who do the everyday buying work within tight parameters that they cannot contravene. In order to change anything, they need permission from someone else, who will usually pass the buck back again. Creative marketing can break this deadlock. Using the right type of promotion can ensure that the key decision-makers talk to each other: if it's done really well, they think the meeting was their own idea.

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### The idea

When the first long-life low-energy light bulbs appeared they cost around ten times the price of a tungsten-filament bulb. Although they used only one-fifth of the energy of a traditional bulb, this was not enough to make them cost-effective, but they last 50 times longer, which is a major advantage. The problem for marketers lay in persuading people that this was worth while.

Osram, Britain's biggest light bulb manufacturer, reasoned that the new bulbs would benefit businesses much more than consumers.

The reason is not the energy savings: it is the maintenance cost of replacing bulbs. Paying someone to change light bulbs in an office building is expensive—but nothing like as expensive as changing them in a warehouse or factory, where the bulbs might be 30 feet above the ground. Unfortunately, Osram’s salespeople reported that maintenance managers were typically given a maximum per-bulb price by their finance directors, a price far too low to cover the cost of long-life bulbs. Finance directors would not talk to Osram salespeople, instead referring them back to the maintenance managers.

Osram’s marketing people came up with a way of getting the maintenance managers and the finance directors together. They mailed a small cashbox to the finance director, with a covering letter telling them that the box contained information that would save their company £50,000 a year. The letter went on to say that the maintenance manager had the key. Keys were mailed to the maintenance managers, with a similar note. Clearly one or other manager would contact the other out of simple curiosity—opening the box provided them with the calculation on the cost savings they could make, if they agreed between them to switch to long-life low-energy bulbs.

## **In practice**

- You need to identify the decision-makers in each organization and personalize the approach.
- Do your homework—you need to spell out to them how it will benefit their company specifically, and if possible how it will benefit them personally.
- Ensure that there is no way they can access the information without getting together.
- Make the promotion intriguing, preferably with a tangible product so that they cannot simply talk on the phone.