Summary

Selling to Academic Scientists

How university scientists research products and make purchases

This guide summarizes the key learnings from our session on selling to academic scientists. **See our website for the full recording and writeup.**

Buyer Concerns

First let's think about the customer's point of view. The direct quotes below, from the panel of academic scientists, show 3 key themes that impact the buying process; **budget**, **rules**, and **risk**.

Budget

"Generally these things go in cycles, and I think we're just on a downward part of the cycle at the moment."

"With the cutbacks at NIH and the uncertainty, my university has been hit really hard financially and has clawed back a lot of things like purchasing power."

"I'll ask our lab manager can you find the cheapest price for us? And look through the main vendors to see what my options are - especially for price."

"Things like disposable pipette tips - it's hard to mess those things up. So in those sort of cases, yeah you would go for the cheap price."

"My PI worked out an agreement where we bought the demo equipment, but we had to buy a certain number of the kits it uses over a certain period of time. That was the only way we would have been able to get equipment like that."

Rules

"For small equipment, we have in our university's online purchasing system a searchable catalog - so if I need a spanner, or microscope slides, just do it there."

"We have to say right, I want to do science X, I'm going to write the grant, I need quotes from three suppliers"

"There's a streamlined approach of running things past the lab manager, who's in touch with the PI, to make sure we're only really buying what we need."

"This is the first institution I've worked at that has really high security to enter the building - sales people can't just come in freely."

Risk

"This is the line on the grant - once we've used it, we can't go back and buy a second one, right? We only get one chance at it, so we want to be confident."

"We know that a process works if we do exactly these things - exactly this glue, exactly this... and we're scared to change it!"

"That's probably the first place that I'm going - somebody who already published on it. Looking at exactly which catalog numbers and equipment they're using, just to lower the risk"

"A lot of our infectious agents are kind of picky in terms of what reagents and products they thrive in."

"We could probably get cheaper ones from other countries, but we would be taking such a risk. Are they going to work? Or are we going to spend a year doing our experiment and then it fails at the end?"

Objection Handling

To address and overcome these concerns, suppliers must demonstrate that they are an economical, safe choice.

Budget Objections

Risk reduction; how much time and grant funding do you lose repeating work if the cheaper alternative fails?

Cost spreading; lets get creative to overcome the initial instrument cost - if you commit to buying X consumables over Y years, I can adjust the price.

Lifetime access; instead of a monthly SaaS subscription, let's talk about a one-time perpetual licence so you know that's secure.

Future Proofing; I understand the grant specified model X, but because the grant process takes so long that technology is already aging out. This is setting you up for the next decade.

Service Provision; that includes X warranty, Y callout times, and a direct line to our technical support team. Of course you also have my details if there are any questions.

Rules Objections

Unique Offering; we're the only provider with [feature / spec], given that's important to your work, let's find a way forward together.

Admin Support; send me those new supplier forms, we can handle the paperwork on your behalf and talk to your procurement team.

Alternative Routes; are our distributors on your system? Or centralized marketplaces like scientist.com, Zageno, or Quartzy?

Authority Assistance; you're not approving the PO, but you're the one saving time and getting cleaner results at the bench. So let's run a test. If you love it I'll write up the summary you can share with your PI.

Risk Objections

Free Samples; let me send some samples, completely free. If they meet your standards, let's talk.

Trial Periods; let's define what you need to confirm this works, then I'll leave a demo unit with you so you can gather that data.

Prove Expertise; I've attached a paper we co-authored with [name] at [university] so you can see how this performs.

Peer Testimony; if you'd like I can connect you with [name] at [site] so you can ask directly about their experience with us.

Open Doors; we'd love to invite you to our production site, so you can speak to our engineers and see how we work.

Custom Service; I'd love to visit to really understand your priorities, and what modifications you'd need. I'm in your area next week, does Tuesday or Wednesday work?

Communication

A note on the channels and approaches academic scientists said they prefer;

✅ Yes

- **Conferences;** seeing the product, and talking to an expert, all while I'm there anyway.
- **Site visits;** your place or mine, it reassures me there's a human I can reach in case of issues. As long as it's pre-arranged - no surprises!
- **Email;** my office phone is not plugged in.
- **Personalization;** your message clearly showed why my work links to your product, so I'll reply.

❌ No

- **OTT Follow-ups;** you're not telling me anything useful, stop checking in.
- **Trashing Competitors;** it's a red flag, like a bully - tell me about you, not them.
- **Lazy Outreach;** you "read my paper" then pitch me something totally unrelated? Delete.
- **Poor Knowledge;** why are you on the booth if you can't talk specs and applications with me?

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