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Strategy and tactics of commercial negotiations: how to establish effective communication

Every business is built on interaction with people: partners, investors, customers. As a result of proper communication it is possible to conclude and maintain cooperation on the most favourable terms. At the business conference of the international fashion exhibition Central Asia Fashion Spring-2025, experts gave a number of practical tips on how to build communication in order to get the best contracts and offers.

Commercial negotiations cover not only the final stage of the sale to the customer, be it a retail buyer, a purchasing agent or a corporate customer. They also include interaction with suppliers, production if the company does not have its own production, and internal team communication. Internal negotiations between departments, often referred to as interaction with the «internal customer», play a key role in the effective operation of the company.



The CAF business conference Spring -2025 told how to conduct effective commercial negotiations

The moderator of the business session, Alexandra Samsonova, co-founder of the agency Smart Marketing and lecturer at the St. Petersburg State University of Industrial Technologies and Design, made it clear that the brand presentation should be structured in such a way that there is no need to offer discounts: «Many brands have repeatedly encountered requests from marketers and advertisers to offer discounts, especially during seasonal promotions, for example, March 8. However, the practice of endless discounting ultimately leads to significant financial losses. Develop a strategy where the value of the product is perceived as high, without the need to reduce the price. And you also need to pay attention to how the company communicates with the market through its communication channels. Consistency, quality of content and the right approach to positioning are the keys to successful interaction with the audience».



Co-founder of the Smart Marketing agency, teacher of the St. Petersburg State University of Industrial Technologies and Design Alexandra Samsonova

Sofia Konstantinova, co-founder of the womenswear brand Persve and ambassador of the Fashion Factory School Alumni Club, spoke at length about the specifics of business communication for a start-up company: *«It's much easier to negotiate when you have a name, years of experience and a reputation behind you. However, start-ups face a number of difficulties: both customers and suppliers are often wary of working with them. There are objective reasons for this. For example, if we consider working with sewing workshops, there is the risk of production instability. Production processes must be continuous, and any breakdowns lead to losses. Start-up companies can have problems with financial planning, so workshops are afraid of delays in payment. Non-delivery of materials is also a risk. In the first year of operation, a company establishes its processes: it finds suppliers, works out logistics and draws up production plans. Adjustments and delays are possible during this period, creating additional risks for contractors».*

Among other risk factors, the speaker mentioned the high probability of bankruptcy. According to statistics, up to 90% of start-ups in Russia fail in the first year of operation, while in Kazakhstan the figure is slightly lower - around 80%. Long-term cooperation with a start-up company involves certain risks for contractors, as there is no guarantee that the company will continue to operate.

From the point of view of clients, especially buyers, the risks are related to reputation. According to Sofia

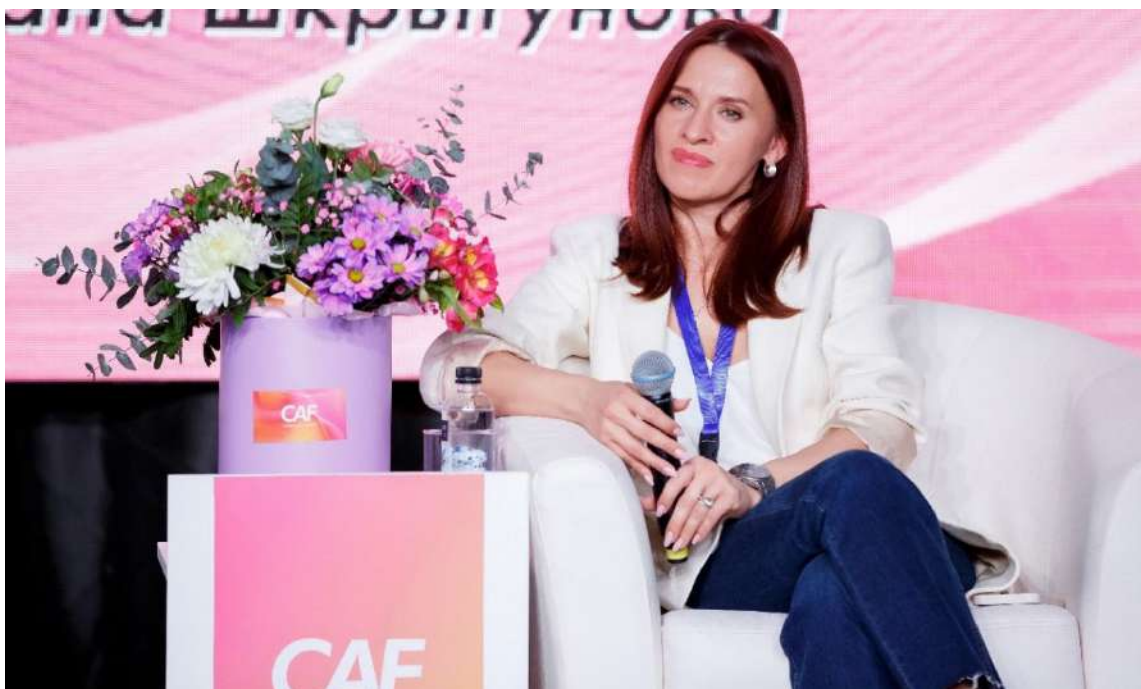


Co-founder of women's clothing brand Persve , ambassador of the Fashion Factory School Alumni Club Sofia Konstantinova

Konstantinova, the most important thing for them is to meet delivery deadlines: *«Buyers work with their customers and are responsible for meeting their obligations on time. Quality control is also important. When a brand is just being launched, production volumes are low and quality control is easier. However, as the company grows and the volume of orders increases, the risk of defects increases. Scaling requires moving to larger capacities and finding new suppliers, and this does not always go smoothly. The stability of the brand DNA is also a potential risk. Buyers test the demand for products; if they sell well, cooperation is established. However, if the uniqueness that attracted buyers disappears in new collections, this can have a negative impact on sales. Buyers prefer to work with brands that maintain their concept from season to season. So it turns out that the cautious attitude towards start-ups is explained by objective factors. However, if you are aware of these risks, you can work in advance to strengthen your reputation, build reliable relationships with partners and minimise potential problems».*

In order to gain trust and build partnerships, the first step is to check how well all internal processes are in place: production planning, stock turnover, document flow, meeting deadlines and commitments. Only when these processes are in place can you move on to building partnerships, especially with buyers and suppliers. Sofia Konstantinova advised getting to know the needs of a potential partner: *«It is important to understand what is a priority for them. In our industry, a lot is built on reputation and word of mouth, so establish yourself as a reliable partner. It is also advisable to analyse market prices. Often, especially in the fashion industry, new entrepreneurs come to business with a creative approach, are passionate about their ideas, but do not like to count. Suppliers who know this may inflate prices. It is therefore important to research the market beforehand to avoid overpayment and unfavourable terms. Define your communication objectives - before you negotiate, be clear about what you want to achieve and what terms are unacceptable to you. And try to talk to your partners in the same language. If we are talking about negotiations with production, but you do not have a technical specialist, it is better to attract one. For example, it's one thing to explain how a dress should look on your fingers, and another to come to negotiations with references, sketches, a selection of materials and clear proposals for processing».*

Ksenia Pukhova, a designer with experience of working with major brands (Brusnikabrand, I Am Studio, Alexander Terexov, Ulyana Sergeenko), raised the issue of the importance of internal communication in branding. Of particular importance is the interaction between teams, which influences the final result and the perception of the product by customers.



Designer Ksenia Pukhova

«Even if there is only one person working in a company - a designer or an owner - it is important to structure the process in such a way that the original idea reaches the consumer unchanged. For large brands, this process is even more complicated: some departments are involved in product development, others in its promotion. For successful implementation, it is important that there are no gaps between them. Let me give you an example. In one of the companies I worked for, we developed a Provence-style collection. It used natural fabrics, checked prints and floral patterns, creating a naïve, sweet image. The designers finished the collection and handed it

over to the marketing department. However, the film crew, who had planned the photo shoot in advance, chose an environment that was completely at odds with the concept - a swimming pool and animal imagery. As a result, the finished content did not convey the idea of the collection and destroyed its original positioning. After such a failure, the company introduced mandatory interdepartmental meetings. Now designers explained the concept in detail to marketers, gave references, deciphered every detail of the collection and provided mood boards - a key tool for visual communication», - says Ksenia Pukhova.

A moodboard is a visual representation of ideas and concepts created using images, colours, textures and other design elements. This tool allows you to communicate the concept of a collection at all stages - from design to marketing - and helps to avoid misinterpretations. According to Ksenia Pukhova, even if a brand does not have separate departments, interaction with external partners (photographers, marketers, SMM specialists) requires clear communication of tasks: *«Well-structured internal communication brings positive results, because the collections started to reach consumers in the way they were intended. And great photo shoots only reinforced the desired effect».*

Experts do not recommend building communication with clients and partners using a system of discounts. Oksana Shkrygunova, the founder of YOS Agency, the head of the project dedicated to the national costume «Ulttyq Sezim», reminded that the price game is the weakest and most unstable form of competition: *«There will always be someone who can offer a lower price, and in this case your brand will inevitably lose. Instead of competing on price alone, it is important to strengthen the value of the brand. And this is not just a buzzword that has caught on with the masses. It is the history of the brand and its unique concept, the strategy of working with customers, the quality of the product, the relationships within the team and a clear understanding of the goals and directions of development. One of the key problems in business is the lack of internal communication. Many companies make the mistake of believing that employees will 'guess' what the company's plans and values are. This does not work in practice. For example, if designers develop a new material or implement a unique technological process, and the marketing team does not understand this and cannot present the information competently to the customer, the brand loses value in the eyes of the public».*



Founder of the communications agency YOS Agency, head of the project «Ulttyq Sezim» Oksana Shkrygunova

Oksana Shkrygunova explained in detail how small brands can negotiate successfully. The first secret of success is to create a unified brand image: *«The company's image should match its internal culture. You can launch large-scale advertising campaigns and create stylish content, but if there is no holistic understanding of the concept within the team, the promotion will be ineffective. Also, be sure to use the «warm entry» tactic. Networking is a powerful development tool. It is important to enter the industry gradually: meet colleagues, exchange contacts, attend exhibitions. Today you are at the Central Asia Fashion exhibition, make sure you get to know each other, do not be afraid to talk about yourself! Start with your inner circle - friends, acquaintances, local partners. This is a solid foundation for future growth. And try to be flexible. The modern marketplace*

demands adaptability. Today, it is impossible to maintain a rigid position without taking circumstances into account. Flexibility is not a betrayal of the brand, but the ability to find different options for solutions and strategies that will help the business develop».

The speakers at the business session were unanimous on the issue of using different channels for communication and promotion. According to them, it is inappropriate to focus only on Instagram. For around 90% of projects, Instagram is currently almost the only communication channel. Relying on only one method of promotion means exposing your business to serious risk.

As the speakers rightly pointed out, relying on a specific social network makes brands vulnerable: if the platform suddenly disappears or the rules of the game change, many companies will simply lose touch with their audience. Alexandra Samsonova suggested actively developing communication channels such as Telegram, VKontakte and LinkedIn in parallel.

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