

Turning an enquiry into a demonstration

Everything else exists to make somebody get in touch. This is the point where the money is won or quietly lost, and it mostly happens in an inbox.

The short version

Everything in the other guides exists to produce one thing: somebody getting in touch. That is the point at which most of the money is won or quietly lost, and it is the part of the business that gets the least attention, because it feels like something everybody already knows how to do.

The evidence across the trade says otherwise. Enquiries sit unanswered over a weekend. Emails get a two-line reply with a price and nothing else. Somebody who was ready to spend four figures is told to “pop in any time”, which is not an appointment and does not get kept.

THE WHOLE GUIDE, COMPRESSED

Answer fast. Ask one question. Offer a specific time. Speed beats polish, a question beats a price, and a named slot on a named day beats an open invitation every time.

1. Speed matters more than anything else you do

Someone enquiring about a hi-fi purchase is usually at the end of weeks of reading, and they rarely enquire with only one shop. The first useful reply frames the whole decision. The third gets read as a formality.

- **Within the hour, in shop hours.** Not the end of the day.
- **Same evening, if it arrives after closing.** A short reply at eight in the evening is startlingly effective, because nobody else sends one.
- **Never past the next morning.** Beyond that you are replying to somebody who has already been answered by someone else.
- **Cover the weekend.** Saturday afternoon and Sunday are when people do this research. Monday morning is too late for a decision made on Sunday night.

If a full answer will take time — you need to check stock, or ask the distributor — send the holding reply immediately and say when you will know. Acknowledged within ten minutes beats perfect within two days.

2. What the reply should contain

The instinct is to answer the question asked and stop. The question asked is almost never the real one. “How much is the X?” usually means “is the X right for me, and are you the people to buy it

from?"

A reply that works has four parts

- 01 **Answer what they asked**, plainly and first. Do not make them read three paragraphs to find the price. Evading it reads as a trick and costs you the trust you are trying to build.
- 02 **Add one thing they did not know**. That it needs more power than people expect. That there is a version with a different finish. That the one below it is better value for their room. This single sentence is the entire difference between you and a website.
- 03 **Ask one question**. One, not five. What are you using at the moment? How big is the room? What else are you considering? A reply with a question in it gets answered; a reply with a price in it gets compared.
- 04 **Offer a specific time**. Not "come in any time". "Would Thursday afternoon suit, or is Saturday morning easier?" Two options, both real.

ON PRICE-ONLY ENQUIRIES

Some enquiries genuinely are price shopping, and you will not win all of them. But a good proportion of people who open with price do so because they do not know what else to ask. Answer the price, then give them something better to ask about. You will convert more of them than you expect.

3. Make it an appointment, not an invitation

"Pop in any time" is the most common closing line in the trade and the least effective. It sounds welcoming. It puts every remaining decision on the customer, gives them nothing to prepare for, and produces no reason to come this week rather than eventually.

A booked demonstration changes the whole encounter. It means the equipment is set up and warm when they arrive, the room is free, and the person who knows that product is in. It also means somebody has committed, and people keep commitments.

- **Confirm it in writing**, with the day, the time and what will be set up.
- **Say what to bring** — their own music, in whatever form. This is the single most useful instruction you can give and it transforms the demonstration.
- **Mention parking**. Genuinely. It removes the last small friction, and for a town-centre shop it is the most common unasked question.
- **Send a short reminder** the day before. It cuts the no-shows and it is one line.

4. What happens when they arrive

Have it ready. Nothing undoes the work above faster than the customer standing about while somebody hunts for a cable, and it is the most common failure at this stage.

- **Set up and warmed through** before the appointment time.
- **Ask before you play**. What they listen to, what they are replacing, what bothers them about it. Two minutes of questions makes the next hour useful.

- **Their music first**, then yours. Their record on your system is the moment the decision is actually made.
- **Let them sit alone with it** for a few minutes. Almost nobody does this. It is the most persuasive thing in the shop, and it takes confidence in your own kit.
- **Say what you would do** if it were your money. They came to a specialist specifically to be told.

5. Afterwards

Most demonstrations do not end in a sale on the day, and that is normal for money of this size. What matters is what happens next, and in most shops the answer is nothing.

- **A short note the following day.** What you played, what you would suggest, what it would cost. No pressure and no discount — just the summary they will need when they talk it over at home.
- **One follow-up a week or so later**, and then stop. Two is attentive. Five is a reason to buy elsewhere.
- **Write down what they came for and what they heard.** If they return in three months, remembering is worth more than any discount you could offer.
- **Ask for the review when they are delighted** — a few days after installation, not at the till. Guide 01 covers why the timing matters.

THE PART WORTH MEASURING

Keep a simple count for one month: enquiries received, replies sent within the hour, demonstrations booked, demonstrations attended. Four numbers, on paper. Most shops have never counted, and nearly all of them discover the drop is between *enquiry* and *booked demonstration* — not in the shop, where all the attention goes, but in an inbox.

ALSO IN THIS SERIES

01 Getting found locally — where the enquiries come from in the first place.

05 Writing about a product in your own words — the page that makes somebody enquire rather than compare prices.

All seven guides are free to read, member or not, at [the Clarity guides page](#).

Clarity Alliance — the British hi-fi industry trade association. The guides are free because nobody joins a trade association for a PDF. They are the argument, not the product. Membership is sold on the card rates, the standard, the conference and Bira.