

**Kevin Hudson**  
**Internet Solutions Consultant**  
**AT&T, Dallas, Texas**

**Job Description**

The *Internet Solutions Consultant* consults with potential business customers to identify their telecommunications needs, with particular emphasis on the use of the Internet as a key tool for increasing business revenue. The Internet Solutions Consultant (ISC) meets with potential new customers to identify their business concerns and to understand the characteristics of their business. The ISC then develops a business proposal, including a cost justification, to describe and explain the telecommunications solutions appropriate to the business. In addition, the ISC may conduct research on the Internet related to the needs of a particular business and writes follow-up letters, as needed.

**CONCEPT: Equations: order of operations**

To set up a formula for cost justification, you can start with very basic figures that you know from the industry, the customer's industry, or that you get directly from the customer. What you might need to add to the mix is specific information about the customer's margin per unit of product. Maybe also the customer's overhead costs that you're reducing and how that plays a part in unit cost of the product. Because what you're trying to do is save some money or help grow some money from the business, so the more specific factors for that business you can include, the better. The more accurate it's going to be. And hopefully, the more attractive your solution will be to the business owner.

Well, it's all basic math. If you can multiply and divide, add and subtract, know what a percentage is and maybe how to do a ratio then you can do all of this. It's not specific math equations that make as big a difference as simply knowing how to put things in order in the equation. If you're trying to determine the unit cost of a product after you've applied your solution then you need to know where to put the various costs involved.

A cost justification is a pretty simple idea, but the results of a cost justification can give you a lot of paths to follow with a customer. The cost justification is basically trying to justify the cost of the product or the solution that you're selling to the customer. You want the end price, the end result of a cost justification to be something that's acceptable to the customer. So you're selling a product for X amount, but it's bringing Y amount of benefits to the customer. So you have to make sure that the cost and the benefits balance out in favor of the customer.

The key ingredient of the cost justification equation is what benefits the customer is getting, so you have to decide and decide with the customer what sorts of benefits they're going to get. Some may be monetary and some may be non-monetary, but if you can get them to put a dollar value on those non-monetary things then you can come up with a total to cost justify with.

And you usually work that into an actual equation, either with the customer or back at the office when you're preparing a proposal. But the idea is that you present them as many ways to look at something as possible, as many positive ways to look at something. You have to realize that a customer may or may not be placing more value on some figures that you put in there, so you always have to let them decide what to spend. But if you come back with a cost justification and it doesn't zero out, it doesn't save the customer any money, there's still going to be an expense to them. You don't know it, but some of those subjective factors might be much more important than any of the monetary factors for the customer. You make sure that your cost justification includes as many of those dollar

figures as it can, but you help present to the customer the benefits so that you stay away from strictly the price issue.

**CONCEPT: Writing concisely**

The kinds of writing skills you need to have-- you need to be able to write a good business letter. That just means a letter that is concise and short and can take a very big concept and pack it down into an easily understood idea. That's the kind of writing you would do for a letter. You also have to do the same kind of writing for a proposal or a presentation that you would give in front of the customer even if you're using View Foils or a Power Point presentation. It's the same type of language and the same concept. You have to take maybe a complex idea with a lot of variables and make it easy to understand and simple to communicate.

Where do you get those kind of skills? I think you have to read a lot because by reading you find out how other people have done the same thing that you're trying to accomplish. And you pick up things from the things you read on how you want to present your concepts and ideas. Another thing is just practice. So practice writing the letters and proposals and putting together presentations for customers. As you get experience presenting these things you'll understand what people pick up on and what they don't and what you need to include and what you need to take out.

Absolutely I draw on my basic writing skills every day, every day. A strong understanding of grammar and punctuation is key because some business owners--if they see one mistake you instantly lose credibility with them--so the basics you've got to have right every time. And then the more creative you make the rest of it, the better.

You should always keep the customer's needs in mind when you're trying to draft a letter or presentation or a proposal because whatever you write should address specifically what they've asked you for. You've got to cover what they need to know. You throw in extra stuff and it gets lost.

### **WORK SKILLS: Listening**

A lot of listening is concentration, the ability to focus on what people are telling you. You have to listen to the words they're saying and also try to figure out what it is they mean by putting it into the context of their particular business, their particular situation. Listening is being sympathetic to what the person is trying to communicate to you. You kind of have to think from their shoes more than your shoes.

You've got to get it right because if you don't there's going to be some sort of a missing link in your communication. You might, as a sales person, miss an opportunity to really translate an idea that's of benefit to the customer into terms that he'll understand or she'll understand.

The most challenging aspect of communication is being sure that you're on the same wavelength with the customer so that you can explain to him the benefits as you understand them and have him understand them the same way, to be just as excited about the opportunity and the possibilities as you are.

Aside from that and along more practical lines you've got to get used to communicating by voice mail and by e-mail because most of the time you try to talk to somebody these days you're going to get an answering machine.

### **WORK SKILLS: Time management**

I think time management is the most difficult thing about the job. You really have got to be on your toes to be able to coordinate everything you've got to do when there's so much opportunity and you like what you're doing so well. You just want to be constantly doing, but you've got to stop and prioritize so that those things that need to be accomplished get accomplished.

In sales, you've got to learn the profitable places to spend your money and the less profitable places, but still sort of match it up to your desire to take care of all the customers no matter how big or small their needs. So time management I'd say is the most challenging thing, organizing your day, planning ahead and making sure you can get it all done.

### **WORK SKILLS: Well-rounded education**

I think the most important thing is to have a well rounded education because then you can draw on all kinds of concepts and knowledge that you have to accomplish what you're trying to accomplish . . . I learned some things that apply, like listening skills, how to write, how to read, how to interpret people and things that are presented to me. So if you get a well-rounded education you're going to have the tools necessary to do the specific things that your job requires later on.

Well, while it might seem unusual that I'm working with businesses, I think coming from a liberal arts background gives me an edge every time I go into a business because I've learned something about the world. I have a different perspective on things, yet I understand a little bit about the specific things that each kind of business does. If you're working with a chemical manufacturing firm you understand a little bit about chemistry. If you're working with a company that manufactures truck parts maybe you understand a little bit about distribution systems. If you're working with a company that makes soap, "hey, I use that."

### **WORK SKILLS: Applying technology**

The company training was the place that I learned about the technical aspects of telecommunications. When it comes to the Internet we're still in the very initial stages of

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this world of opportunity, so a lot of that came experientially. I got on an on-line service, figured out how to use it and started developing for myself-- using some of the ways it could benefit me.

Then as a manager at the Boy Scouts I began managing with technology, developing automated spreadsheets and communicating with e-mail and sending attached files to the people that worked for me. It allowed them to save time in what they were doing, communicate back to me in a timely manner for the information that I needed. So it was all kind of experiential. Every time I needed to do something and I knew it could be done easier, faster, better through the Internet or with some new technology I tried it out. Those that worked I kept and those that didn't I let go.

I'd say that today the Internet is one of the surest ways that a company can grow. It's a tool for a business and if it's applied properly there's no question that it's going to bring them some benefit, whether increasing revenues because it expands the reach that their company has or decreasing internal expenses because it makes the communicating and information sharing that they do more efficient.

**WORK SKILLS: Researching a business**

You like to do as much research ahead of time as you can. That may be reading about the company, looking them up on the Internet. If a company has a web site there's usually a wealth of information about the company on it. Another technique is to call ahead and ask questions. You need to ask questions of the person who can give you the right kinds of answers. You might speak to a receptionist. You might speak to a marketing director. You might speak to a product manager. But you need to do a little investigation ahead of time. That is the best thing of course.

**JOB/CAREER: Job overview**

My title is Internet Solutions Consultant. That's the title AT&T gave me. Now what that really means is quite a different thing. It portrays the right thing to the customer because we're coming in to consult about how to use the Internet, how to benefit from the Internet. And so what I actually do is consultative selling, which means we're not selling a product to the customer. We're not going in and asking him if he wants this widget or that widget, but we're saying, "Tell us about your business concern." And we look to uncover different areas of concern with the customer. Once we've identified something that they can benefit from then we bring in all the resources available to us.

So it's not one single product, but it might be a batch of solutions so that we can address an area of concern we've uncovered with the businessperson. So that's why it's consultative selling. It's not direct selling of a product -- a little bit different.

Not all the solutions involve the Internet. What we're trying to achieve for a company (customer) is something along the lines of growing revenue, decreasing internal expenses, so it may relate to the Internet. It may relate to telecommunications in general, but it also might relate to office processes and how they handle things internally through their manufacturing, through their office.

So it can be a number of things not directly related to what we sell as a business, but that's part of the value of our relationship with the customer. I can leverage other knowledge and other factors to present them a solution that's going to solve what they are trying to solve.

**JOB/CAREER: Great thing about my job**

A great thing about my job is I get to work with customers of all sizes. We categorize them by their long distance billing, and so I work within a range of long distance billing on these customers, but I work with shops that have two people and I work with very large manufacturing operations. There's just no telling what kind of business I'm going to come across and that's one of the great things about my job.

What I find most interesting about my work is getting to meet people from all walks of life doing all sorts of things to generate their revenue that's part of this country's economy. I mean I get to meet every kind of business that you can imagine. People that make things, people that sell things, people that provide some sort of a service. They all have similar needs that relate to business. I've got to say the most interesting thing is coming across the things that are the same and the things that are different in every customer.

**JOB/CAREER: Typical day**

My best days are the days I'm strictly in front of customers visiting them personally and going through the questions trying to uncover their areas of concern or in some way match up a solution that we have to the problems that they're seeing or the opportunity that they have not yet taken advantage of. My best days are in front of the customer.

I'll typically go to the customer premise, usually accompanied by another executive from AT&T. Once we get to the customer's premise we have the discussion and I usually leave with a list of things to do for that customer. I like to come either straight back to the office and get that done or go on to the next appointment and come back at the end of the day.

My list of things to do usually includes writing a proposal, generating some figures, probably doing some cost justification on our solution so that it's an easy decision for a business person to make to take our solution, writing follow up letters, doing research on the Internet related to the businesses that we're trying to find solutions for.

**JOB/CAREER: Liberal arts background**

It's a little bit different for me than it might be for most, but I think that just shows that no matter what you're doing you can get where you want to be. For six years I was an executive for the Boy Scouts of America. The skills that I developed there by working in a community to promote the scouting program, to raise funds, to organize events, all translated into what I do now. So I did a job that gave me a well-rounded set of skills, and then I brought them into what I was most interested in.

I think coming from a liberal arts background gives me an edge every time I go into a business because I've learned something about the world. I have a different perspective on things, yet I understand a little bit about the specific things that each kind of business does. If you're working with a chemical manufacturing firm you understand a little bit about chemistry. If you're working with a company that manufactures truck parts maybe you understand a little bit about distribution systems. If you're working with a company that makes soap, hey, I use that.

I got an undergraduate degree in political science and history, so it was a liberal arts degree, but I was always interested in business. When I started working on my MBA in night school, that's when the whole world of business started opening up and I thought, "This is very interesting."

I was lucky enough to find a job that, like I said, let me go around and visit every kind of business you can imagine and learn about it. So I developed some skills in the non-profit world. I brought them into the for-profit world and at each step of the way I was just following what seemed to interest me the most. If you do what you're interested in, always with a goal to turn it into something, then I think you'll always give your best and you'll always end up with what's best.

**JOB/CAREER: Career path at AT&T**

I haven't been here that long--18 months...I started at AT&T as an account executive working with AT&T's full bag of products, meaning I could take care of a customer from the long- distance standpoint, from the Internet standpoint, from the data- networking standpoint. I had sort of all the company's resources at my disposal and then I had a set of customers that I took care of and another set that I tried to take care of. They were our growth prospects.

What I do now is related strictly to one set of features in that bag of goodies and learning the most I can about that product set and the benefits for our customers and then applying that with account executives who already have other accounts.