Last month we introduced a concept that I call “the gap”:

Product ← Customer

This gap is the distance between the prospective customer and your product. As long as it continues to exist, your customer has less software and you have less money. In order for the sale to occur, this gap must be closed. Until that happens, the gap represents all of the issues and obstacles that are preventing the customer from making the purchase.

As Chief Sales Geek in your ISV, it is your responsibility to figure out how this gap is going to get closed. You have exactly two ways to do it:

• Move your product to the right.
• Move your customer to the left.

Last month, we talked about “proactive sales,” or “moving your customer to the left.” This month, we will talk about the other way of closing the gap: moving your product to the right.

In Part 1 of this two-part column, I claim that most small ISVs do not need a sales guy and should not use the proactive sales approach. This month, I describe an alternative approach. Instead of proactive sales, we will talk about “responsive sales.” Let us first highlight the differences between these two models:

- **In proactive sales**, the sales guy is in charge. He initiates contact with prospective customers. He tells them about the product. He answers all their questions. He stays in regular contact. He provides all the energy and all the momentum. Eventually, he convinces the customer to make a purchase. He receives money from the customer and delivers the product.

- **In responsive sales**, the customer is in charge. He initiates contact with your company only if and when he wants to do so. He hears about your product from a friend or an ad or a weblog. He reads everything he can find about your product and its features. He contacts your company to ask questions. He makes his decision at whatever pace makes sense for him and his organization. Eventually, he decides to make a purchase. He contacts your company to exchange money for product.

These contrasting descriptions may actually make responsive sales seem unappealing to you. After all, do we really want to trust the customer to handle all these important tasks?

Yes, we do.

I acknowledge that responsive sales can be scary. It feels like we are delegating a critical project to somebody we don’t know and have probably never even met.

But a reward lies behind this risk. The truth is that customers *like* being trusted. They *like* making their decisions without pressure from a sales guy. They *like* to be in charge.

For all these reasons, responsive sales works very well, as long as we hold up our end of the deal. We have to be responsive. Yes, we are letting the customer be in charge, but we are not powerless.