

MASTER CLASS

5 Steps to Confirming Seed Orders

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Table of Contents

- Introduction 3
- Step 1: Understand the True Benefits..... 4
- Step 2: Timing is Everything 6
- Step 3: Getting Physical 8
- Step 4 : Confirm Fields, Not Orders..... 9
- Step 5: Build a Confirmation Checklist 10
- Summary..... 11



Introduction

To many seed sellers, order confirmation is one of the most dreaded activities. This is usually because they don't understand how to do it.

What many fail to realize is this process, when done right, can generate extraordinary benefits.

Order confirmation has the exact same *modus operandi* as every other customer contact and that's simply to sell yourself. The only real difference from a sales call is that the actual sale occurs prior to the confirmation. When you fully understand confirmation, it's easy to see why it's one of the most important steps to creating an environment where you can lead the customer.

In Rod's **SeedSeller** dictionary, confirmation is defined as:

confirmation *noun* [kon-fer-mey-shuh n]
your last line of defense between sales and inventory.

In fact, *confirmation* is the only surefire way to protect you and your company from the unwanted high costs of potentially excessive, or out-of-balance, inventory. When properly executed, confirmation uncovers who are, and who are not, going to keep their promises to use the products they've pre-ordered.

It sounds simple, doesn't it?

Yet the word confirmation sends chills up the spines of most field sellers because it denotes extra work, repetitive duties, possible cancellations of previously written orders, and unwanted changes. On top of all this, it also means the continuation of a hard-fought sales season.

Confirmation is the key to seed selling success at the customer, dealer, territory, and company level.

It's the time of year that gives everyone who has ordered seed the opportunity to make a promise to pay for it and plant it, or to back out of the deal.

Order confirmation is the second most important step in the sales process—second only to writing the order itself. Unfortunately, however, few field sellers do an adequate job of order confirmation. Today, the cost of getting a sale is at an all-time high. Growers continue to double and triple book seed by ordering from several companies. Seed may be in short supply and inventory costs are almost unaffordable. You'd think order confirmation would be the number one priority in every company, but it's not. This sloppiness will continue to cost salespeople and their companies, year after year.

In this Master Coaching Class, you will learn **Five Steps to Confirming Seed Orders.**

STEP 1

Understand the True Benefits

As I indicated on the previous page, too few **SeedSellers** understand the true benefits of confirmation. If they did, they would never skip this vital step in the sales process.

Take a look at what confirmation does for you, your customer, and your company. It's easy to see why the process has become one of the most important steps towards reaching sales goals, especially in this new, high-valued inventory marketplace.

- C** *Controls* perceptions of you, your company, and your products
- O** *Organizes* your customer to follow your lead to produce a top crop
- N** *Neutralizes* the possibility of growers not following your cropping plan
- F** *Futurizes* your grower's thinking, focusing him on raising high yields
- I** *Internalizes* decisions to help growers take personal accountability
- R** *Regulates* what is sold to each customer to ensure balanced portfolios
- M** *Magnifies* your importance in the customer's decision-making process



STEP 1

Understand the True Benefits

Confirmation Means Opportunity

Below are the *Twelve Biggest Opportunities from the Confirmation Process*. Check the ones you need to take better advantage of during confirmation.

1. Opportunity to utilize the only defense against late-season “deals” from competitors
2. Opportunity to resell the buyer and reassure him that he made a good decision
3. Opportunity to raise perceptions of you and your company
4. Opportunity to increase order size
5. Opportunity to lower returns
6. Opportunity to know final sales sixty days before planters roll
7. Opportunity to know how achievable next year’s goals will be
8. Opportunity to determine the effectiveness of your sales story
9. Opportunity to finalize the cropping plan
10. Opportunity to remind the buyer his sales rep is taking care of his needs
11. Opportunity for the buyer to learn more about products
12. Opportunity to save the buyer money by offering timely discounts



STEP 2

Timing is Everything

Order confirmation affords sellers the opportunity to increase the size of the sale, collect cash for it, and set up early delivery. For most seed sellers, the most difficult part is knowing when to begin confirming previously written units. Is it ever too early to begin the process and when is it too late?

The most effective time to confirm orders for next season is during harvest, assuming you are selling according to the 21st century sales calendar, of course. This means you must finish all of your cropping plans prior to harvest.

All confirmations need to be done prior to harvest.

If you achieve this, you will have already booked your sales goal by the time harvest begins. Farmers make their final seed buying decisions “on the combine seat” during harvest. At this time, product performance is fresh in their minds, they’re excited, and they’re ready to talk about next year’s seed needs. And anyone who has ridden combines before knows that harvest is also a time when too many growers are relying on their yield monitors to make buying decisions—or at least those growers who don’t have a cropping plan in place.

If the cropping plan is already in place when he’s harvesting, the grower will ask you before making any drastic changes in his plan. Either way, you need to be there at harvest to help him make the right decisions, otherwise he will base them on last year’s results and they will be wrong.

Riding combines is the most effective way to build and maintain strong relationships with customers.

It is also the only real way to see your products in action, performing in dozens of environments, under a multitude of management systems. In an upcoming Master Class, we will dive deep into the Harvesting Customers strategy.

Visit rcthomas.com/salestools to learn more!



STEP 2

Timing is Everything

How is the Confirmation Strategy different when the selling season gets really late?

The answer is it doesn't change at all.

Even if seed is booked later into the season, nothing changes.

If confirmation isn't done during harvest because you don't have the order yet, then it needs to be done after the order is written as a prelude to delivery. Remember, just as earlier orders lead to larger orders, the earlier the confirmation, the greater the chance of that order getting planted.

The formula for raising perceptions and developing a relationship with growers is the same. They still need to spend quality

time with their sales reps in order to get to know them and trust them enough to follow the sales reps lead. The tendency of the sales rep is to shortcut the process, but that never works. Eventually both you and the customer will suffer if the proper amount of time is not spent laying the foundation for a long-term relationship. An important part of laying that foundation comes during the order confirmation process.



Getting Physical

Selling seed is a physical career. You make farm calls, you take growers to their fields, you're there when they plant, you ride their harvesters in fall, you often get involved in the delivery and return of unused seed, and you're responsible for collecting the account. But, when I'm talking about the *physical* side of selling seed, I'm only focusing on confirming sales using face-to-face contact.

Some of the most grandiose surprises in history have come from customers whose orders were confirmed using non-physical methods such as phone calls or by using excuses like, "I can't get ahold of him, but I know he's going to take it." Whether the seed is in your warehouse awaiting delivery, or it's still in the possession of the company itself, every product ordered needs to go through the confirmation process.

Confirmation is not hard, but it is totally physical. The contact must ALWAYS result in placing a specific variety, in a specific field, on a specific number of acres.

It's no longer just asking, "Are you taking the product, or aren't you?" It's about committing to the cropping plan the way it's laid out. If sellers are not getting physical by seeing growers face-to-face to ask those questions, or by taking them to their fields to assist in the

confirmation process, true confirmation is not taking place. In those cases, the sale should be canceled and the products placed back into inventory.

Confirmation is a strategy used to ensure the *future*—not the present. Make sure you start by understanding there is no easy way to conduct this all-important step to achieving your goals.

Getting physical through face-to-face contact is all about being there to instill belief and trust in your customer, while helping him make a very important business decision. What seed is he going to use to generate income next year? That trust is essential if you expect him to follow your lead in helping him make that decision. Even if he's been buying from you for a long time, face-to-face confirmation is a great opportunity to continue to build on that relationship.

The logical concern now is what to say when you make a physical confirmation sales call. Well, don't worry because I'll be going into detail on *what to say* and *how to say it* by giving you word-for-word scripts in an upcoming **Objections & Role-Play** class.

Going face-to-face with a buyer is the ONLY option available if you expect the seed you sold to get planted.

STEP 4

Confirm Fields, Not Orders

Do Not Confirm Orders, Confirm Fields By Customer!

Your cropping plan for each customer is not designed to write a seed order, so don't try to confirm orders that way. Your cropping plan is designed to put your plan into an entire field, so make sure you confirm sales in that same fashion.

Even if you aren't yet writing cropping plans, you should still confirm your seed orders by field, not by order, or by variety. The only thing the grower knows for sure is how many acres of corn he will be planting in each field. You are the one who makes the decision on each variety and where it needs to be planted.

Remember to assemble “portfolios” of products for each field. That is, grouping at least three different varieties together for each field or farm.

Farm Name & Location	Crop Planned	Prev Crop	Drainage Soil Type	Yield Goal	Fert. Levels	Variety Recommendation	Plant Population Rec.	Acres	Units Needed	Allocated Units
Home 120	F. Corn	Bns				97 Day - ACME 56277	34,500	120	51.8	41.4
Refuge							34,500	24	10.4	10.4
Johnson 160	F. Corn	Bns				98 Day - ACME 55310	34,500	140	60.4	48.3
Refuge							34,500	28	12.1	12.1
Tommy 200	F. Corn	Alfalfa				97 Day - ACME 56277	34,500	65	28.0	22.4
Refuge							34,500	13	5.6	5.6
Smith 240	F. Corn	Peas				97 Day - ACME 56277	34,500	160	69.0	55.2
							34,500	32	13.8	13.8

Notes:
Spring 28% Pre-Emerge at 10 gal/A.
10-34-0 at 6 gal/A.

Total Units: **209.18**

You need to know that every field possible is being planted to your seed and that seed has been paid for. When you get specific by field, rather than by order or variety, the order becomes valid and has a much lower chance of being altered.



STEP 5

Build a Confirmation Checklist

This is the year you're going to confirm each and every single order you've written. Yes, you may get some unexpected bad news with some cancelled orders, but at least you will know ahead of time. But you will also get some unexpected sales increases from growers who need more seed from you.

So before you start the process, make sure you have a complete Confirmation Checklist put together that includes the following:

Update Customer Profile

- Update contact information to include e-mail and cell phone of key farm personnel

Reconfirm Three-Year Operational Goals

- Expand, rent, or buy more land?
- Pay down debt?
- Bring a family member into the business?
- Any retirement plans?

Reconfirm Yield Goals

- Next year's yield goals for the farm by crop
- Next year's yield goals by field by crop
- Three-year yield goals for the farm by crop
- Three-year yield goals by field by crop

Reconfirm Cropping Plan

- Field by field by variety portfolio matchups
- Order form completed and approved by grower
- Payment terms completed and agreed upon
- Return policies discussed and approved
- Reconfirm seed warehouse information
- Approval of seed storage facility
- Reconfirm delivery information
- Approval of seed package type
- Approval of time for seed delivery
- If seed is already delivered and in the warehouse, was it labeled with a confirmation sticker?



Reconfirm Calendar and Communication Procedures

- Proposed date for planter visit discussed and approved
- Post-planting "stand approval" visit discussed and approved
- Bi-monthly field visits through harvest with grower present approved
- Proposed date to begin next season's crop plan discussed and approved
- Proposed date for harvester rides discussed and approved
- Proposed date to finalize next season's crop plan discussed and approved

Note: No fluorescent confirmation sticker means no sale. That is the rule. Whether it's in a dealer's warehouse waiting for delivery or in the customer's warehouse, without a confirmation sticker on the side of the bulk box, pallet, or bag, it is still in the possession of the company and is not yet sold. Every unit of seed ordered needs to be designated as confirmed delivered with a confirmation stamp or sticker.

Summary

Confirmation is a Great Training Tool

Field sellers who rely on order confirmation as part of their sales strategy have the largest sales increases and the fewest returns every year. That's about as profitable as any sales territory can get.

A profitable seed business like that comes not only by executing the confirmation strategy, but also by using confirmation as a training tool for customers. Twenty-first century seed businesses rely on well executed confirmation of seed orders as a key financial strategy for both themselves and their customers. It trains growers on how important it is to plan early and stick with the plan. That process alone eases one of the greatest financial burdens seed companies carry today and that is managing expensive inventories.

That's why top companies train their sales reps to be SMART managers of their businesses so when planters take the field, these SMART seed sellers aren't even trying to manage returns to control haulback because everything was previously confirmed.

Instead, they're busy "hauling out" extra seed that ensures they will exceed their yearly sales goal because there are few or no returns to detract from their sales.

Make the **5 steps to Confirming Seed Orders** part of your Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and you will find that profitable growth will become standard as well.

Be sure to take the quiz at the end of this course and test your knowledge from this Master Coaching Class.

Happy Selling,

Rod Osthus





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