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STEP OUTSIDE THE SALES COMFORT ZONE

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If the economy is impacting your sales effort, you are probably asking yourself, "What can I do differently?" Most sales organizations fall into the same old routine, calling on the same old customers, dwelling in a comfort zone that will not challenge them to change their approach to selling. And of course, this generally leads to the same dwindling sales results.

So, how do you motivate your sales force to go after new niche markets?

1. In these tough times, you need to re-invent your sales force through motivation, not threats. Most professional sales people are motivated by reward and recognition. They choose a career in sales because they are competitive and want to win.
2. Providing incentives beyond monetary rewards is a challenge all good sales managers must embrace during these tough times. Rewards can include: paid trips, extra vacation days, a bigger car and new electronics like an iPhone or BlackBerry®.
3. Recognition programs that identify the top performers and communicate this to the entire organization and its customers are also a very effective method of motivation.

A combination of both reward and recognition is probably the most effective approach as sales people love to be recognized and expect to be rewarded when they go above and beyond.



Prepare The Sales Message

Before you start waving the carrot to get your sales people moving, your marketing approach needs to be refined with a clear vision of how you are going to win over these potential new customers. Remember, selling is about having the right products, at a fair price that you can deliver when the customer wants it. It's also about relationship building. People do business with their friends. Do you assist your sales force in developing these relationships? You should, because it will be critical to your overall success in new market niches.

OK, you have the products, your price is right and availability is strong. The next step is to develop a message that your sales force can deliver consistently and effectively to your new potential customers. There are a multitude of ways to get this message out to assist your sales force, including:

- Print advertising
- TV
- Radio
- Web banners
- Postcards
- Direct mail
- Fax and e-mail

In most cases, the choice of communication will depend on how specialized your niche market is and how readily available the customer database can be obtained.

You're ready now, right?

Not quite, how are you going to convince your sales force to pursue an unfamiliar market, industry or group of customers? Just pointing to a new niche opportunity and telling your sales force to go get it will not work.

Investment In Sales Training And Education

If your plan is to pursue new niche markets or industries, an upfront investment in sales and product training must be part of your overall marketing strategy. Today, training goes beyond the traditional product centric

focus of selling features and benefits. With markets becoming more competitive, understanding how your products benefit the end customer and tying those benefits to your customers' ROI is an important aspect of your sales team's education. By utilizing Web-based technology, training your sales team goes beyond the traditional hands-on, onsite methods to Web-based programs that have built-in interactive modules.

These cost-effective methods

allow a manufacturer to respond quickly and more efficiently to an ever changing competitive landscape. Educating your sales team with continuous ongoing training programs is an investment you can't afford to overlook.



Find Qualified Sales Leads

Developing good qualified sales leads that have been prescreened is a very effective method to get your sales force over the fear factor of calling on new customers. With the multitude of databases available, this task is accomplished faster and more efficiently today than ever before. The hard part is keeping the database current and up-to-date. Dedicating an internal resource or outsourcing this function to a firm that is experienced in data management is an expense worth exploring. In today's competitive market, customer information management is a critical business discipline many executives overlook, or do not place enough emphasis on. Ensuring that your sales force has good qualified leads will in turn drive better time management, more effective results and ultimately more sales.

Creating the right message, developing the right sales tools and making sure you establish a consistent reward and recognition program are all part of making sure your sales team can find a new comfort zone in the new market niche your competitors are also looking for. This same approach could also prove highly successful in other countries as well. With the state of the industry today, it's important to take advantage of every profitable new opportunity. Some industry segments that are still strong today include: mining minerals, coal, underground utility, public works and pipeline (gas and oil). The export business also remains strong. Taking the right steps, you can effectively create opportunity to make up for slumping areas of your business.



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