

Reaching Out

Keep In Touch For More Sales

by Ronald E. Lang

How often are you contacting and keeping in touch with your prospects and clients? Do they want contact? If they do want contact, how often do they want it? How are you managing this process?

These are important questions to ask when managing the sales team and business development efforts. Many times companies will set up a "Drip Marketing" campaign to touch prospects and clients with some form of correspondence on a frequent basis. If you set up a campaign with too much frequency, then you end up with "Drip Irritation." These contacts will get annoyed with your correspondence, opt out of your e-mails, disregard your calls and you'll end up without opportunity.

Shotgun approach, rifle shot or surgical strike—all these are different methods of target marketing and have different cost variations. The rifle shot and surgical strike requires more pre-campaign database work than the shotgun approach, but the shotgun approach is a costlier campaign because of the mass messaging with low conversion rates.

So what is the right amount of frequency? That's up to you. Per-

haps you might go by revenue of the company or potential opportunity and categorize them accordingly. By doing this you are segmenting your database and making it easier to target prospects and clients for selected products and services. The messaging on your campaigns will be more of a "surgical strike" on those contacts versus a "shotgun" approach for your product and service offerings. This type of segmentation and proper campaign planning will reduce your overall marketing costs and yield you higher contact and conversion rates.

With all the new and future laws of "unsubscribe" and "opt out" and "do not call" lists, you need to make sure that your database is current and you have properly profiled your contacts. Dun & Bradstreet states that data change on average of 11 percent annually. This could be address, phone numbers, company name changes due to re-branding, mergers and buyouts along with contacts changing.

Typically, the number-one change is contacts. People move on—they get fired, new positions open up, responsibilities get shifted, and so on. Because of this, it is im-

perative that your sales reps are keeping your database current. If you have active clients and their information is not accurate, there is a problem. Prospects could be tougher to keep up with, but if you have good qualification data and frequent contact (i.e. monthly or quarterly), you will always be current.

Many marketers will tell you that once-a-month contact is the best frequency. Make sure the messaging has value and also has two or more ways the prospect or client can contact you for more information. There are many services available on the internet to send customized HTML e-mails to prospects and clients so the messaging is tailored toward them. This creates a more targeted campaign and should increase your conversion rate.

Based upon the stages in your sales cycle, do you have a frequency of contact? If not, you should have one so sales cycles are shortened. This will help you with opportunity management.

You might have 100 opportunities your team is working on, but which are the "right" ones to work with? Only by gathering the proper informa-

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Tools Of The Trade

Even Paperwork Can Create A Good Impression

by Michael Bradley

Have you ever heard the phrase "touch points" used in a marketing context? This is not a medical term for use in acupuncture, and it's not an X/Y point on an automation touchscreen. In marketing, touch points represent any connection or experience that your customer or the public has with your organization. Every touch point leaves an impression, and in many cases touch points in your company carry an expectation from your customer.

Experienced business people will agree that consistent performance is the strongest predictor of future success. A company that consistently performs poorly can predict a lack of future sales. A company that consistently performs well and always meets or exceeds customer expectations can predict strong future sales (all things being equal).

The obvious question for a marketing discussion is how consistently does your company perform and execute well at every touch point? And, why does this matter?

Let me use an accounting example. Let's say your operations department has consistently performed well on a 12-month project. You have met your deadlines, your workmanship is good and everyone in the field is happy. But, the project requires progressive billing, and your accounting department has twice sent invoices to the wrong address, missing the draw deadline. And, they have consistently failed to follow the schedule of values established at the beginning of the project. Instead, they have billed according to the over/under calculation from your accounting system. While the project manager for the general contractor likes your work, he hates having to deal with your accounting department. One touch point is working well and the other touch point is not, effectively canceling out the good will developed by your operations group.

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tion and following up with the contact frequently, will you be able to determine which opportunities you should be spending more time with.

Obviously, if there are large opportunities that you've identified, but they are not returning your call,

committing to a timeframe or letting you talk to the decision-maker, then they probably are not the right opportunity to work on. Of course this doesn't mean that you shouldn't contact them, just not as frequently as the right or "real" opportunities. Sales managers want large pipelines and want to help their sales team close deals faster, but they also want to spend time on the real opportunities that value your company's time, services and products. Typically, this is called the sales funnel, but filling it up with any opportunity just to show a high level of sales activity will not convert into expected sales. This makes the supporting resources to your sales team spin their wheels, ultimately costing the company money.

Consider the following. A sales rep has 20 opportunities in the pipeline, and they all have varying probabilities and estimated close dates. Have you set up a probability scale that is standard for your organization? Meaning, a 75 percent probability is the same for everyone as far as what that means for

Action Items

1. Keep your data current.
2. Profile your contacts accordingly.
3. Categorize your prospects and clients for future marketing campaigns.
4. Decide on your target marketing; shotgun, rifle or surgical strike.
5. Develop a standard approach to your sales cycle.
6. Close more deals by following steps 1-5.

closure and where they stand in the sales cycle. If not, make this an action item right away.

Most sales management will only get involved in a sale once the probability is at 75 percent estimated close. This might be a reason why sales management has disappointing performances, because their reps are not standardized on their sales cycle and end up in neutral on sales that don't close or are lost to a competitor. The only situation worse than losing a sale to a competitor is not knowing about an opportunity. This comes back to "keeping in touch."

In another situation, if someone is going through a bid process and they are contacting you for a bid submission, did you perform due diligence to find out if they already decided on a competitor, and they just need a bid to satisfy company policy? This would not be a real opportunity and needs to be identified. No opportunity, no contact.

Knowing the frequency of contacts with opportunities is more of an art than a science. The first step is to aim in the right direction, second is to make sure that you have the right ammunition, third is decide how many times you want to hit the target, fourth, collect the prize.

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