

Fill The Pipeline

Marketing Consistency Is Key For A Steady Business

by Ronald Lang

Making sure the business development efforts are consistent is the bane of all sales people. It is now the second quarter and while the year is well on its way, if your pipeline isn't fully developed, the second half of this year will be even tougher. Some sales reps load up their pipelines early, but don't stay consistent and often have the huge peaks and valleys throughout the year. Although many seasoned professionals avoid these ups and downs because they have a huge account base they tap on a regular basis, they also lack consistent efforts finding new business.

Are you a hunter or a farmer? It takes talent to do both extremely well and grow your business at the same time. Trying to grow your business mainly from your account base is extremely difficult and often makes those sales reps complacent.

That might be understandable since "hunting" is hard. If it were easy, no sales manager or CEO of a company would ever discuss the need and desire for new business and how important it is for financial health.

Acquiring new clients, retaining those clients, and expanding those relationships over years are the three success factors to any business. Senior management knows these factors and always has a big push for acquiring new business. The strategy and vision required to acquire new business becomes the seductive idea behind this success. Each business goes about getting business differently. This is why no one "system" works well for everyone. Strategic and tactical plans are required to be put in place so everyone understands what their mission is and how to accomplish it effectively.

One of the first steps to strategic and tactical excellence is under-

standing who your customer is and how can you help them be more successful. Once you know this, purchase other "like" prospect information and proactively follow up with everything in your arsenal. Testimonial information of other "like" companies, success stories, and invitations to seminars that you might be hosting are great ways for an introduction. All of these strategies will work if you proactively follow up and provide different messages to the key point people in those organizations about how your company can benefit them.

The standardization of effective sales and servicing of clients is often neglected. If customer service and technical people do not document their work properly, often the customer response time suffers from a lack of understanding of their environment. If your customer service is documenting properly, they should be communicating with sales on potential new opportunities. Some of these opportunities could be new construction, another division, merger or acquisition, up-sell or cross-sell on new or existing products.

These opportunities are very important to the expansion of your re-

lationships with your clients. The expansion helps strengthen your relationship to now take advantage of testimonials, referrals, and client visits. From a strategic point of view, set up lofty goals for your sales team. These goals should not necessarily be revenue numbers, but underlying factors of success. For example, set goals for the following, each by month, quarter, or year:

1. Number of new accounts
2. Number of up-sells (or product replacements) for a particular product
3. Number of renewals of service contracts

4. Number of customer referrals

These underlying factors will all turn into revenue one way or another, but it will keep the team focused on the smaller areas of success versus concentrating on the lofty goals. The pipeline will fill up quicker, and the team will identify more opportunities by paying attention to the underlying factors. By doing this exercise, the customer will have greater attention, and an action plan will be set forth to better service them in the future.

If you are able to get referrals from your customers, make sure you show your appreciation. You never know whom someone else might know or what information they might be willing to offer until you ask. Asking is the number one reason why many salespeople fail to meet their objectives. Asking for the sale or purchase is only half the battle, but asking for referrals is something they should take great pride in. When a client provides you a referral that means they trust you and feel good about the service you provide. Make the client feel special about the referrals and thank them accordingly.

The ability to fill your pipeline with valid opportunities will help you achieve the success you expected. By setting goals for underlying factors, the sales team will have greater focus and will know where they stand on a regular basis. Pipelines need to be filled on a regular basis. Provide support to the sales team, set lofty goals and make sure there is always plenty of sales activity with existing and prospective customers.

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