

Five Ways to Beef Up Sales... Immediately

Last week, one of my clients—we'll call him Rick—had a demo scheduled with a prospect. The standard "show up and throw up" they typically did early in the sales cycle.

Trying to shorten the sales cycle, I asked naively, "Why does the customer want to buy? What are they trying to accomplish?" Rick couldn't tell me. I asked if he thought the salespeople knew. He said no. I gave him an assignment: he had to find out "Why," "Why now," and "What's it worth." Otherwise no demo.

In other words, no compelling reason to buy? No demo. So Rick took a risk, and is rapidly moving to a fully-paid trial implementation.

Sure, long-term objectives and plans still matter, but I've been getting more and more inquiries focused on "what to do now." Entrepreneurs and executives alike are demanding help on how to improve revenues and profits right away.

How do you make the quickest difference? Focus the bulk of your energy on revenue generation. In other words, sales! And don't do it the same old way either, because -- as you may have noticed -- it isn't working that well.

Here are five ways for your sales force to bring in more business in short order. There are no magic bullets, but just last week I taught one of these techniques to a client (#2) and he used it to close a deal the following day! Use one or use them all. Each technique will have its own effect, and each will multiply the power of the others.

1. Sell return on investment, and sell it to the CFO.

Sales people are complaining that while the pipeline may be full, the deals are taking too long to close. Perhaps that's why the pipe is so full! What are the reasons for this? Companies have money, and in many cases they have needs. But many people are so scared THEIR customers aren't going to buy THEIR wares, they loath to spend any money themselves. The result? They are only willing to spend money when they absolutely see near-term financial payback, and the CFO is killing many deals.

The solution? Sell the return on investment. Sell the payback. And sell it to the CFO. Arm your salespeople with two things: A series of case studies that document the returns from using your product, and a well-defined ROI process worksheet. Work with the CFO to build the ROI case so that he or she owns it. This is the only way they come to believe it. Make it their idea and instead of killing your deal, they will help you close it.

2. Forget USP. Determine your Usage Cases

Instead of focusing on why your product is the latest and greatest, clarify the ways in which potential customers will use your product to solve specific problems and produce tangible results. Then, instead of touting the "benefits" of your product--which often fall on deaf ears, anyway--engage your prospects in conversations about what costly and quantifiable problems they now have, and how they might use your product or service to alleviate those.

And, as sales guru Mike Bosworth says, don't tell them your offering IS the solution. You're a sales "guy" and they won't believe you. Instead, ask them if your possible solution might help them. If they believe it does, they have accepted your solution as truth. Then get them to tell you, in real dollar terms, what fixing that problem is worth.

3. Increase Sales Training. Use the 10% solution.

But don't expect any one salesperson—even your superstars—to be 100% at every part of your sales process. They almost never are. But there is a way you can raise the level of every person in your sales organization—immediately.

Use this process adopted from W. Edwards Demming's principle of optimization. Break your sales process into as many discrete—but meaningful—steps as you can... Cold calling. Letter writing. Setting appointments. Identifying pain. Writing proposals. Presenting. And so on. Find out who in your organization excels at each step, and have those reps explain their methods and mindset to the rest of your sales force. Do all the steps at once in a marathon session or one step at a time. Either way, the results will be amazing.

4. Use the 80/20 Rule. And get rid of the bottom 20.

There's no room in today's world for mediocre producers. Hold each member of your team accountable for reaching two kinds of performance benchmarks: results measurements, which include not only revenue, but perhaps new accounts and repeat business, and action measurements, which might include prospecting calls, appointments, and new contacts.

Not every sales person will be a superstar, but every one should pay their own way—and then some. Salespeople who aren't producing not only cost you money, they drag down the performance of your whole organization. You may not pay them very much, but why pay them anything? I suggest you do both yourself and them a favor, and let them go. Don't worry about having an empty desk: that warm chair was an expense your company doesn't need.

If you feel it isn't fair to "dump" them, or if your sales cycle is too long to measure short-term revenue results, give the problem reps a 30-day plan to increase their level of activity in specific ways. That's long enough to see an improvement if there's going to be one.

5. Track your results and work harder

Most entrepreneurial sales organizations fail to analyze their efforts. They have no idea how much effort—or money—it takes to create a new customer. The only indication they have of whether salespeople are "doing enough" is based on the revenue numbers. The answer? Track both activity and results, and use the statistics you garner to quickly raise performance. Break your sales process into a series of meaningful steps, counting each time a rep completes one. Calculate averages and set a benchmark. And while you're at it, analyze the percentage of deals that close whenever you complete that step. That knowledge can dramatically improve your sales forecasts.

Once you establish benchmarks—this one's a no-brainer—RAISE THE BAR. Yes, that's right, because the fact is, revenue isn't coming in fast enough. Do everything discussed above to improve your sales effectiveness—then do more of it. Just working smarter isn't going to cut it. You're going to have to work harder as well. And anyone who doesn't want to? See number 4 above.