

SALES MANAGEMENT

REPORT

Sample

▣ Practical ideas for successful selling

Sample

How to protect your company's reputation in the digital age

If you're not keeping track of what people are saying about your organization on the Web, what you don't know can hurt you. Here's what to do before lies and unfounded rumors sink your company:

- 1. Monitor the newsgroups.** Use search engines like Google Groups to find forums where people are discussing your industry, products, and—if you're a high-profile company—your CEO and other top officers. Read what they're saying about you. Don't jump in immediately, even if you find negative information. Some rumors die out quickly; others get refuted by other users.
- 2. Respond as necessary.** Don't be afraid to correct misinformation and let other users know the real

story. Take a straightforward, no-BS tone, but avoid anything that might sound like an advertisement for your organization. Most users really want to know the facts.

- 3. Go to the source.** If one particular person seems obsessed with dishing dirt about your company, contact him or her privately. Find out what the real problem is, and see if you can correct it. If the person is irrational, you can point that out (diplomatically) in the newsgroup as well.
- 4. Copy and save negative comments.** Download and save all postings relating to your company in case you need them for legal action.

—Adapted from “How to deal with lies about your company (and you) on the Internet,” by Daniel Janal, on the Frugal Marketing Web site

Look for these must-have factors for better hiring

Successful hiring isn't a question of finding salespeople who are “good enough.” For better hiring, don't settle for anything less than these “need to have” factors:

- **Technical skills.** Whatever you're selling, your salespeople need to know how to use it. If they don't when you hire them, are you prepared to offer the training they'll need in order to get up to speed?
- **Competencies.** Examine your market to determine what specific sales competencies your salesperson must

have. In a competitive market, you'll need someone aggressive; if you've established your position, you want someone good at maintaining quality relationships.

- **Attitude.** Consider whether you need an independent self-starter or someone comfortable working in a team role—or some other behavioral style.

—Adapted from “What salespeople can learn from the world of athletics,” by Colleen Stanley, in the *Denver Business Journal*

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How to gauge the status of sales efforts

Tell your salespeople to finish every sales call with a question that establishes where they stand with the customer. “Shall we meet next week to finalize the proposal?” “If I get those figures to you, are you ready to sign?” “May I talk with the person who has to approve your decision?” Questions like these will tell them, and you, how close they are to an actual sale. —Adapted from “Sales Tips. At the end of your sales call, where do you stand?” by Bob Thompson, in *On the Front Line*

Don't lose proposals to procrastinating customers

Don't make it easy for clients to ignore proposals from your sales force. For instance, when salespeople send a proposal and then follow it up with a call, they've allowed the customer to control the timing. Before sending a proposal—or *instead* of sending it—your salespeople should call to touch base with the customer and set up an appointment to discuss the next step. Calling first keeps the salesperson in the driver's seat.

—Adapted from “3 quick money-making marketing tips,” by Sharron Senter, on the Senter & Associates Web site

Satisfy customers by prioritizing their objectives

Successful salespeople target a customer's objectives. Once those are clear, situational issues like budget and time frame are less important. *Advice for your sales force:* If the customer seems to have multiple business objectives, ask him or her to rank them. Sorting them by urgency and priority will help your salesperson zero in on the solution that will help your customer the most—building the start of a solid, long-lasting relationship.

—Adapted from “The Costell sell,” by Josh Costell, on the Applying Knowledge Systems Web site

Support your sales force with consistent marketing efforts

Your salespeople depend on marketing to pave the way for them. So make sure your marketing efforts follow these guidelines:

- 1. Track your investment.** An effective ongoing marketing campaign costs money; an ineffective one wastes money. How do you tell which is which? Analyze your efforts. Ask customers where they heard of you. Make sure your salespeople find out what advertising they've seen, which offers caught their attention, what they've heard about your company from other sources, and more. Repeat successful efforts and eliminate those that don't produce.
- 2. Diversify your endeavors.** Don't limit your marketing program to just one kind of customer, or audience, or communication strategy. You may find one that's very productive, but you must keep testing and trying new marketing ideas so

you never grow too dependent on one that can dry up.

3. Don't cut back in a downturn.

You may be tempted to cut your marketing expenses along with everything else when business is slow. Don't. Without a consistent marketing campaign, customers will forget you're out there waiting for them. Instead of doing away with marketing, pay closer attention to what works and emphasize those strategies.

4. Seek a wide range of viewpoints.

Open yourself to advice and ideas from as many different perspectives as you can. Don't let your ego get in the way of listening to your sales force, or hiring a dependable marketing consultant, or conducting focus groups to find out what customers respond to.

—Adapted from “5 marketing mistakes you can't afford to make,” by Debbie Allen, on the AllMerchants Web site

Four ways to marshal the power of testimonials

One positive testimonial can be worth more than a dozen slickly printed sales brochures. Here's how to get maximum value from it:

• Create a “testimonial book.”

Collect the testimonials you receive and put them together in one file or report. When customers ask for information about your company and products, provide them with a copy of your testimonial file so they can see what others have said about you.

• **Post them online.** Scatter testimonials across your Web site. Don't restrict them to a single area; place them high on every page. Look for testimonials that speak of specific products and use them on Web pages that feature those products.

• **Record them on audio.** Ask customers to read their testimonials

out loud to create an audiotape of customer comments. Add the comments to your voice-response system for callers to hear while they're on hold, or include them in your presentations.

• **Form a partnership.** Check your industry for an organization whose products complement yours. Make an agreement: You'll provide a testimonial, which the other company can use to market its products to your customers, if the other person will endorse your product and allow you to court their customers. You both win.

—Adapted from “Using customer testimonials in your marketing message to break down fear and skepticism,” by David Frey, on the Business Know-How Web site

Track the right issues to measure sales performance

Sales volume is an important measure of a salesperson's success. Smart sales managers know other factors are important to evaluate, though. To keep your salespeople productive over the long term, pay attention to these additional areas:

- **Sales volume vs. units sold.** One salesperson closes a single deal worth a million dollars. Another lands ten sales worth \$100,000 each. Which sales pro is more valuable to your organization? Don't overlook salespeople who produce consistent numbers on a daily basis in favor of those who score an occasional high-ticket shot.
- **Profitability.** Generating revenues is good, but if that doesn't translate into profits, your efforts are ultimately futile. Make sure your sales force is pursuing deals that contribute to the bottom line, not just looking for break-even sales.

- **Productivity and efficiency.** A salesperson who spends 12 hours a day, 7 days a week to make his or her numbers probably isn't managing his or her time as effectively as possible (or your quota is unreasonably high). Beware of honoring Sally for all her extra hours if Jill brings in the same sales figures in less time.
- **Customer service.** Retaining current customers is vital to most companies. It requires time that might be spent chasing new business, though. Do you reward salespeople for keeping today's customers satisfied, or penalize them for ignoring existing customers in favor of new ones?
—Adapted from "Sales volume: Truth or myth?" by Dirk Zeller, on the Real Estate Library Web site

Resolve commission issues up front to avoid headaches later

Sales compensation can be a complex and sensitive subject. To avoid misunderstandings, address these basic issues before digging into the details of your organization's commission structure or bonus plan:

1. **What is a "sale"?** Specify what constitutes a sale—a verbal agreement, a signed contract, a paid invoice? Does the amount of the sale impact how it's recognized for commission purposes?
2. **When does the salesperson receive credit?** Again, your options are numerous. Your sales force needs to know what they have to do for their efforts to be recorded. This will help them plan their activities and focus their energies.
3. **When do you pay a commission?** If you cut commission checks only after receiving payment, make sure your sales force knows

that up front. Whatever your criteria, if you deliver commission checks on a monthly, quarterly, or annual basis, set up a plan for reconciling payments if an employee leaves without warning or gets terminated.

4. **Split commissions.** Define clearly how you'll handle commissions when two people share in the sales effort. Avoid creating resentment between salespeople, and between your organization and your sales force.
5. **Draw against commission.** If you allow salespeople to take an advance against future commissions, spell out the conditions and terms so you're both prepared and protected.
—Adapted from "Can your compensation plan pass this test?" by Brian Jeffrey, in *Targets-SM*

Defeat cold call nerves with this technique

Cold calling can make even the most seasoned sales pro nervous. Here's one way your salespeople can defeat the fear: Instead of trying to force your anxieties away before making a cold call, concentrate on feeling even more anxious than normal. You'll have a harder time producing sensations of nervousness artificially. Use the feeling this produces when you pick up the phone. It's a paradox, but it works.
—Adapted from "Cold feet?" by Bob Baker, on the Gulf News Web site

Generate accurate forecasts with revenue commitments

How well do your salespeople forecast their results? Here's how to stay on top of things: First, instead of a monthly sales forecast, ask for a revenue commitment for the coming two months. Committing to a definite amount of revenue changes the perspective and makes the salesperson more accountable; the two-month period allows for longer sales cycles. When you look at the salesperson's results every month, review his or her revenue commitments. Find out what sales haven't appeared and why. Don't berate the salesperson for failing to meet his or her commitment, but analyze his or her actions to see what could be changed in the future.
—Adapted from "Creating a predictable revenue stream," by Ken Thoreson, on the Sales Expert.biz Web site

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Sales Management Report
on the Web, go to:

**www.management
resources.com**

Delve for details behind buying decisions to target customers better

Why do your customers buy from you? The question seems simple, but its answer can tell you a lot about serving current customers and selling to new ones. Find out: What dissatisfied them about previous products before they bought yours? Did they buy this to cut costs? Increase revenues? Improve the quality of their own products? Gain a competitive edge? The more detailed information you can learn about the reasoning behind their buying decisions, the better you can mold your strategy for success.

—Adapted from *Sales Force XP*

Ask this tough question to save time and frustration

Sometimes the best question a salesperson can ask is the most dangerous: “Is there any reason for you not to do business with us?” It’s dangerous because it gives the customer an easy chance to say no. But it can save time and frustration by bringing deal-breaking issues out into the open early. Tell your salespeople to ask a version of this question early in the sales process to make sure they don’t invest too much time and energy into a relationship with little potential for a successful sale.

—Adapted from *Secrets of VITO*, by Anthony Parinello (Entrepreneur Press)

Simple question during hiring process prevents problems later

Prevent job candidate remorse when you’re hiring new salespeople with this tactic: Once you’ve made a job offer, invite the candidate to come back in and ask any question he or she was hesitant to voice during the interview process. Emphasize that you won’t withdraw your offer at this point. Some candidates may back out after asking their questions, but that’s better for everyone than hiring someone who leaves six months later because of an issue that a simple conversation would have uncovered at the outset.

—Adapted from *Sales & Marketing Management*

Create happy customers by avoiding these errors

If you take customer satisfaction for granted, you’ll find yourself all alone when competitors offer better treatment. Be careful to avoid these common customer service misconceptions:

- **Silence is golden.** You haven’t received any complaints from customers in months, so they must be pretty happy with you, right? No, chances are they’re just moving on to your competitors because they don’t think you care about their opinions. If you’re not getting feedback from customers, you’ve got to seek it out yourself—with focus groups, surveys, online response forms, and other tools for collecting customer comments. Let your customers know what changes you’ve made in response to their gripes.
- **You know your customers inside and out.** Customers are a moving

target. What you “knew” about them yesterday may not match what they think and want today. Don’t stop asking people what they want from you and what they don’t want from you. And don’t ignore what they say even when you think you know better.

- **The customer is always right.** Yes, you have to pay attention to what they tell you. Paying attention isn’t the same as following their demands blindly, though. Some customers need to be educated—diplomatically—about how you can solve their problems best. Other customers may not be worth your time and aggravation, particularly if they’re abusive to your workforce or unrealistic in their expectations.
- Adapted from “The four great myths of customer service,” by Paul McGee, on the Sales Expert.biz Web site

Reward your bottom line by rewarding loyal customers

Creating a successful customer reward program isn’t just a question of selecting cool gifts to hand out. The right strategy includes close attention to these four factors:

1. **Awareness.** Customers won’t participate in your program if they don’t know it’s there. Communication is critical; you need to let them know what prizes they can earn, how they can earn them, and how those prizes will affect them. For instance, do the prizes have more of an impact on their professional goals or personal lives?
2. **Attainability.** Spell out what customers need to do to earn the reward—win prizes by buying a certain amount of merchandise or spending a specific amount of money, for example. Emphasize how easily customers can track their progress and win each prize.

3. **Attractiveness.** Naturally you want to offer prizes that will appeal to the customers you want to do business with. Your marketing communications should build up the value of your prizes and their relevance to the customer’s goals and desires.

4. **Completion.** The prizes shouldn’t seem like a distant goal but an immediate target. Use language and pictures that allow the customer to anticipate the experience of winning. Guarantees of easy selection, quick delivery, and other important fulfillment issues will go a long way toward grabbing and keeping your customers’ interest.

—Adapted from “The Tao of wow,” by Rick Ferguson, in *Colloquy*

Little details matter in sales

Sales writer Chris Lytle, hurrying through Chicago's O'Hare International Airport to catch a flight, passed a shoeshine stand on the way to his gate. The shoeshine man caught Lytle's eyes and called out, "Sir, let me shine those Cole Haan loafers for you."

"No, thanks," Lytle said automatically, but after half a dozen steps he found himself trying to remember if his shoes really were Cole Haans. Pausing in a rest room, he checked the shoe label, which did indeed bear the Cole Haan name. Walking back to the stand, he told the shoeshine man, "I changed my mind. I need a shine after all."

A sharp salesperson's attention to detail can pay off.

—Adapted from "The power of a great approach," by Chris Lytle, on the Monster Web site

Real customers count more than voices on the phone

When a customer makes an effort to buy from you, you need to give him or her some priority. Columnist Jesse Kalisher makes this point in *Brandweek*, complaining about retail clerks who ignore customers in the store while helping customers on the phone. Whether you're in retail or some other industry, you'll find a lesson in Kalisher's tongue-in-cheek solution:

"I'll just browse around a store by myself and as soon as I have a question, I'll simply dial up the place," he writes. "'Hi,' I'll say in my best I'm-too-lazy-to-come-into-your-store-but-I-want-you-to-serve-me-ahead-of-everyone-else-anyway voice. 'You know the sofa you have on sale sort of behind the counter and to the left over by the potted palm—where the cute, really intelligent-looking guy with the cell phone is standing? Yeah, yeah, that sofa. Does it come in anything other than tiger-striped crushed pink velvet?'"

Okay—some customers call on the phone because they can't physically get to the store. Or they may plan to come in, but want to make sure the store carries exactly what they need so they don't waste the trip. And some customers who do come in may just be browsing with no real intention of buying anything. But Kalisher's complaint has its merits. Customers who feel important are more likely to buy from you. Make sure that whether your customers are on the phone or in your store, you let them know they've got your attention.

Listen, connect people, and sell

Keeping an open mind toward people and possibilities can create opportunities for sales where they seem least likely. At least that's Martin Lemieux's philosophy. Here's one time it worked:

One day he received a phone call from a telemarketer. Lemieux had been involved in some network marketing programs in the past, so he knew what the constant rejection of cold calling can be like. But he also has a personal rule that he'll listen to a telemarketer only if that person agrees to hear a sales pitch from him.

This day the telemarketer agreed. Lemieux had a client in the shipping business, so he asked if the telemarketer knew anyone who needed to ship packages anywhere. The telemarketer said, "Actually, I'm thinking of sending a small package overseas." Acting quickly, Lemieux called his client and set up an immediate teleconference. The telemarketer got the information he needed to send his package, and in turn, Lemieux listened to the telemarketer's spiel. The telemarketer was selling health magazines, which Lemieux wasn't interested in, but he did provide the name and contact information of a more likely prospect. In the end the telemarketer sent his package with Lemieux's customer and sold a magazine subscription to Lemieux's other referral. Of course, that doesn't happen every time a telemarketer calls, but Lemieux takes a positive approach every time.

—Adapted from "Telemarketers: Don't like them? Here's an idea for ya!" by Martin Lemieux, on the Smartads Web site

THE WINNING EDGE |

Anecdotes
and tips to
enrich your
career

Personal Success

Decisions pave the road to success

What spurs the decisions your customers make? For that matter, what psychological forces drive your own personal choices? The answers will help you guide your customers into purchasing appropriately—and may help you make better personal and professional choices, as well. Remember the “Six Ps”:

Pleasure. What feels good to the person?

Profit. What option will provide the person with the best return on his or her investment?

Peace of mind. What will reduce worries and let the person feel good about him- or herself?

Prestige. What will make the person look good to others?

Power. What will provide the person with the control he or she wants?

Pain. What will help the customer avoid or eliminate important problems? —Adapted from “Sell yourself on your goals,” by Dean Lindsay, on the Dean Lindsay Group Web site

Ask these questions for better networking

Networking successfully is a skill that will benefit both your professional career and your personal life. The key is asking questions that encourage people to open up and share. Go beyond “Who are you? What do you do?” when you meet people. Ask thought-provoking questions like:

- *Where do you do most of your work? Do you travel much? Where have*

you been (either personally or professionally)?

- *What do you like most about your job right now?* Focus on drawing out positive information—don’t let your conversation turn into a gripe session.
- *What’s special about your company?* What does it make or do that’s unique? Give the other person a chance to brag a little.
- *What are your accomplishments?* Find out what awards the person has won, or what he or she is most proud of—at work and outside of it.
- *What would make someone a good prospect for you?* In professional situations, this question can open a fruitful discussion about how you can help each other.

—Adapted from “Increase your sphere of influence: How to network,” by Doug Stanart, on the Leader’s Institute Web site

Use your ‘mental eyes’ to listen better

In sales, and in your personal life, good listening skills will help you thrive. *One tip:* Train yourself to visualize what the other person is telling you. When prospects describe their manufacturing process, picture the technology in your head; when they discuss serving their customers, visualize a customer calling up with a question; when your spouse talks about work, imagine seeing the people and environment he or she spends the day in. This exercise will help focus your mind and keep your attention fastened to what the person is telling you.

—Adapted from “Improve your listening skills: 3 steps,” at http://caca.essortment.com/improvelistenin_rsmpt.htm

Build sales success around these core beliefs

Success in sales starts with a positive belief system. To develop a healthy, productive sales attitude, ground your activities in this philosophy:

•
My product is important to people. (Tip: Think deeply about what you sell and link it to some vital human value, like friendship, health, integrity, etc.)

•
My primary goal is to serve my customers.

•
I don’t close sales—I help my customers make the best decision they can.

•
My success or failure depends on what I do in life, not on what happens to me.

•
I succeed only when I truly help my customers and my colleagues.

•
I am committed to staying up-to-date on learning new skills that will help me do my job better.

•
The most powerful attitude I can cultivate within myself is gratitude.

•
I look for the best in every person I meet, and treat everyone with dignity and respect.

•
I can do much more by cooperating with other people than I can ever accomplish alone.

—Adapted from “A winning sales philosophy from: The Art & Science of Printing Sales,” by Sean McArdle, on the MJM Speakers’ Bureau Web site

Persistence

“Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.” —Samuel Beckett, in *Worstward Ho*

Success

“Success is often achieved by those who don’t know that failure is inevitable.” —Gabrielle ‘Coco’ Chanel, fashion designer

Information

“As a general rule, the most successful man in life is the man who has the best information.” —Benjamin Disraeli, 19th-century British statesman

Sales Success

How to overcome the ‘That’s against our policy’ objection

How many times have you heard a customer say, “I’d like to buy from you, but our policies say I can’t because _____”? Most official policies are like budgets—they can be changed if someone inside the organization wants to change them badly enough. So don’t sigh and walk away. Probing the policy a little can create opportunities for flexibility. Ask some questions like:

- Who created this policy?
- How long has the policy existed?
- Why was it created in the first place? What problems did it solve?
- Who’s in charge of making sure the policy is followed?
- Is this a good policy in your opinion?
- Can we talk to the people responsible for enforcing it?

—Adapted from “Company policy,” on SalesrepsWinner-Net

Build customer relationships with practical news

Keeping in touch with your customers between sales is important. Calling “just to touch base,” though, can be a time-wasting exercise. Every time you call a customer, you should have *something* of value to share. Your conversation should be strictly directed at the customer and his or her needs: “I thought you’d like to know . . .” and not “I wondered if I could help you with anything.” Try these ideas:

- **Industry news.** You’re keeping track of the customer’s market and industry in order to sell more effectively, aren’t you? So call your customer when something changes that might affect his or her business: “I just read that one of your competitors is going out of business. I wondered if you needed to increase your order with us to take advantage of the opportunity to expand your market share.”
- **New company policies.** If your company changes the rules on purchasing procedures or financing options, let your customers know right away so they can plan accordingly. “We’re going to begin offering a bigger discount on orders of \$1,000, and I thought you’d want to take advantage of this right away.”
- **Company changes.** Do you have a new CEO? A new salesperson? Have you acquired a new division? “Hi, I

just wanted to let you know that Mr. Smith is retiring and our new CEO is looking over our price structure. Here’s what to expect . . .”

- **New products/services.** Of course you should let existing customers know directly when you launch a new product. Don’t forget to update buyers about service plan changes and new options for making purchases, returns, or upgrades.
- **Brainstorm more ideas.** Get together with a group of people from different parts of your organization. Generate possibilities for a sentence that opens: “I was just calling to let you know _____.” The more heads you have to help you develop ideas, the more good ones you’ll have in store for future use.

—Adapted from “What to say on repeated follow-up calls,” by Art Sobczak, on SalesDog.com

Break price into smaller pieces to overcome objections

Price is perhaps the most common objection you’ll hear from customers in your sales career. One way to respond is with a strategy that breaks the price into smaller elements and spreads it across a longer period. Here’s how it works:

Ask the customer for an estimate of how long he or she expects to use your product once it’s been purchased. Depending on your price, divide the amount of money your product costs by that time estimate—12 for a monthly figure, then 4.3 for a weekly amount, then 7 days for the daily rate. By this time you’ve probably broken the price into amounts that are much easier to accept. Going through this price-reduction process step by step—instead of simply jumping to the daily rate—will give time for the real value of your product to sink in on the customer.

—Adapted from “Put price in a ‘reasonable’ perspective,” by Laura Laaman, on the American City Business Journals Web site

Life

“The moment of victory is much too short to live for that and nothing else.”

—Martina Navratilova, tennis player

Helpfulness

“To be successful is to be helpful, caring, and constructive, to make everything and everyone you touch a little bit better. The best thing you have to give is yourself.”

—Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, inspirational writer

Personal Inspiration

Don't think too much to succeed

Sometimes you concentrate so hard on trying to do something that you yourself get in the way of really doing it. Case in point, from a speech by lawyer Leslie A. Wittlin of the Canadian legal firm Gowlings, delivered at a meeting of the Business Innovation Group in January 2004:

"I was playing catch with my 10-year-old son in the backyard one Sunday morning. My daughter was most anxious to join in the game, but she was completely inept at catching the ball. I could sense her mounting frustration with herself, and I decided to try to take her attention off catching the ball to just watching it. I threw the ball back to my son and asked my daughter to tell me which way the ball was spinning. I did this a few times, each time changing the way the ball was spinning until I was satisfied that she was watching the ball as opposed to concentrating on catching it. I then threw the ball towards her high in the air and asked her to tell me which way it was spinning but not to catch it. I did this three or four times, and soon it was clear to me that she was watching the ball. I then threw it directly at her when she wasn't expecting it, and she caught it with ease. From that moment forward, she was always able to catch. The point is that sometimes people get so caught up in the concept that they lose the experience."

So stop trying too hard, and just do it.

To tell the truth means providing the chance to grow

Does the truth hurt? The fact is that frequently the other person already knows, on some level, the answer to the question they're asking you.

One morning a small boy asked his mother, "Mom, is there really an Easter Bunny?" She felt conflicted. She'd never liked pretending the Easter Bunny was literally real, but her son seemed to enjoy the egg hunts and other Bunny-related festivities so much she went along with it. But when it came time to confront the truth, she didn't know what to say.

Finally she took a deep breath and asked her son: "Would you really want to know?"

The boy was quiet for a moment, then said, "I already kind of know. I just wanted to hear it from you."

So she was able to tell the truth. While she felt a little sad, she also felt good about learning what her son was capable of understanding and accepting. It's something to remember when you have a possibly unhappy truth to share with someone: They may be looking for confirmation, and the fact that they're asking you means they're ready to deal with it.

—Adapted from "Why people do not get fired: The psychology of discipline avoidance," by Joni Johnston, on the WorkRelationships Web site

Find the positive side of change

We've all had the experience of trying to make a change in our lives, yet failing at it. Even when we know the change will be an improvement, we fall back on our old, familiar habits. Professional life coach Drew Rozell, who attempted to quit smoking many times before succeeding, suggests that one question can power your efforts: *How do you really feel about the change?*

For Rozell, giving up cigarettes "would be about sacrifice, it would be about pain, it would be about being deprived of the pleasure of smoking. None of those associations *feels very good.*" He went back to smoking time after time because smoking felt better to him than the pain he associated with stopping. "Whether I was aware of it or not, I *wanted* to keep smoking."

When he stopped pressuring himself and concentrating on all the negative aspects of quitting, he smoked for a while, then found himself thinking about the positive effects of not smoking. After that, leaving cigarettes behind was much easier.

"Remember," Rozell writes, "you always get what you want. Always. Double-check what you are really asking for by becoming more aware of the emotions behind your desires."

—Adapted from "It's not about the Marlboros," by Drew Rozell, on the Attractionville Web site

Instincts

"Once you get rid of the idea that you must please other people before you please yourself, and you begin to follow your own instincts—only then can you be successful."

—Raquel Welch, actor

Change

"The measure of success is not whether you have a tough problem to deal with, but whether it's the same problem you had last year."

—John Foster Dulles, statesman

Hard work

"Working hard overcomes a whole lot of other obstacles. You can have unbelievable intelligence, you can have connections, you can have opportunities fall out of the sky. But in the end, hard work is the true, enduring characteristic of successful people."

—Marsha Johnson, CEO of the Red Cross

How to qualify prospects better and close more sales

Your salespeople can improve their closing ratios by qualifying customers up front more effectively. Here are some areas they should explore:

- **People.** Who is your salesperson talking to? In most organizations, several people will be involved in any major buying decision. Who else is going to be involved? Find out as much as you can about other players so you can target your offer with precision.
- **Buying process.** A customer's decision may be complicated by bureaucratic procedures, competing interests, and other factors. Your salesperson should probe the customer's process to find out what kind of steps—and how many—you'll be expected to take before reaching an agreement.

- **Time constraints.** How quickly does the customer need to make a decision? What's the timetable for researching options, listening to proposals, considering alternatives? Look at the urgency of their need and you'll have a good idea of how to prioritize your sales strategies. Why are they listening to your salesperson right now?
- **Money.** What's the budget for the customer's purchase? Does it fit your pricing options? Is the money available right now, or will some of it have to come from other areas? Your salesperson may be able to assist with financial considerations if he or she knows the customer's budget constraints.

—Adapted from “The fundamentals of qualifying business-to-business prospects,” by Jack Carroll, on the SalesLinks Web site

Target only the most likely prospects to increase sales

Chances are your marketplace holds lots of potential customers who don't even know your company exists. You can increase your visibility among these prospects with the following strategy:

1. **Analyze your market.** Create a database containing names of everyone who could reasonably be expected to buy from you. Divide the names into two categories: those who have bought from you in the recent past, and those who have never done business with you.
2. **Hire a call center.** You need people to make phone calls to the names on the second list. Don't ask your sales force to start working the list—they need to focus on loyal, current customers. Assign the list to another section of your department, or hire an outside firm to make the calls.

3. **Disqualify prospective customers.** That's right—whoever makes the calls to list number two should concentrate on ruling people out, so that salespeople don't waste their time pursuing the wrong prospects. Have your callers ask two basic questions: “Have you ever bought this type of product?” and “Is there any reason why you might buy this type of product in the near future?” A No to both questions is sufficient to disqualify the prospect.
4. **Give qualified names to your sales force.** You now have a list of fresh, likely prospects for your salespeople to contact. A good salesperson will jump at the chance to start working this list of leads.

—Adapted from *The Positive Power of No*, by Kim DeMotte (Facts on Demand)

Team salespeople with technical experts for better sales

If your sales force sells a product that's even remotely technical, you might want to consider teaming each salesperson with someone from the technical side of your organization on certain sales calls. This will save your salesperson from having to master the intricate details of the product (or give incorrect answers to customers' questions), show your customers that your organization is dedicated to giving them the answers and assistance they need, and expose people outside your sales force to the experience of working with customers. Everybody benefits.

—Adapted from “Time and attendance overhaul,” by Dan Schell, on the Business Solutions magazine Web site

Conduct a ‘salesperson forecast’ to keep today’s sales force strong

Assess your sales force retention by projecting ahead a few years. Where are your top salespeople going to be? Where should they be? Whom do you really want to keep? What are you doing now to develop your people and make it worth their while to remain with your organization? Remember to look toward the future if you want to keep your sales force strong.

—Adapted from the Commonwealth Sales Consulting Web site

Use the right FORM to build conversations with customers

Do your salespeople have trouble getting customers to open up? Tell them to initiate conversations by remembering the word FORM:

F: Family. Ask about parents, partners, children, etc.

O: Occupation. Probe into what the customer does for a living, and what he or she would like to do. Ask about professional achievements and goals.

R: Recreation. What are the person's hobbies and interests?

M: Motivation. What drives the person to succeed?

—Adapted from *The Relationship Edge in Business*, by Jerry Acuff with Wally Wood (Wiley)

Learn a lesson from every sales call

Make every sales call a learning experience for your sales team. When you're coaching a salesperson after a call, ask what he or she learned that could apply to other accounts. The question will prompt people to keep their minds open and constantly look for chances to improve their sales techniques.

—Adapted from “E-mail sales rep coaching: Almost like being on the road with your reps,” by Donna Siegel, on the SalesMBA Web site

‘Triangulate’ for more accurate sales forecasts

The ability to predict your chances of making a particular sale can be a tremendous advantage to you and your sales force. Don't expect your salesperson to make the forecast alone. Instead, teach them to “triangulate”: Get opinions from at least two other people. You should be one, and the other should be an associate with some knowledge of the product and the customer—perhaps a technical expert brought along to explain product use and other details. The more perspectives, the better chance you have of accurately assessing the situation.

—Adapted from “How to defeat your two biggest competitors . . .,” by Steve W. Martin, on the Heavy Hitter Selling Web site

Pause to gain more information when customers raise objections

Teach your salespeople not to rush in with a response when customers raise objections. A 10-second pause is better. The long silence may prompt the customer to say something that changes his or her objection. *For example*: “We really can't afford anything priced higher than \$___ . . . [Here's where *you* pause!] Although if you could provide a longer service contract, we might be able to swing it.” Now the customer has given you something to work with so you don't have to argue over the objection itself.

—Adapted from “Overcome objections,” by Todd Natenberg, on the TBN Sales Solutions Web site

What to look for when you forecast sales

Forecasting sales may be more art than science, but you don't have to depend on the stars and a Ouija board to make reasonable sales projections. Most sales forecasts depend on what the customer says he or she expects to buy, the company's previous buying history, and the salesperson's personal instincts. You can pin down forecasts more precisely by looking at these indicators:

1. Consistency with other people.

Chances are more than one person in your organization has contact with the account about which you're trying to make projections. Do the perceptions of these other people match the salesperson's forecast? Agreement can be strong evidence in favor of projections.

2. Negative customer news. Keep an eye on what's happening to the customer's organization and industry. If the customer's company faces cutbacks or if layoffs are growing more common within the customer's industry, that will affect your forecasts.

3. Price increases. Have your prices gone up? No matter what the cause, you've got to expect that a rise in your prices will have an impact on your customers' buying patterns.

4. Competition. If you have strong competitors battling for customer dollars, you have to assume that some of them may turn your customers into *their* customers. Even if they don't buy from your rivals, customers may use your competitors to put pricing pressure on your sales force.

5. Management changes. New managers are unpredictable. Even the possibility of change makes forecasting a riskier proposition. Listen to what's being said about your customer to estimate the chances that a key manager or representative will be replaced.

—Adapted from “Secrets of bull's-eye forecasting,” by Stewart A. Washburn, on the Stewart Washburn Web site

Identify opportunities worth pursuing with this checklist

At some point in the sales process, you and your salesperson have to decide whether a potential customer is worth pursuing. Use this checklist to analyze the opportunity:

- **Likelihood.** Does the customer have an important, driving reason for making a purchase? Is the money available?
- **Readiness.** Have you helped the customer establish his or her need for your solution? Do you know the customer's time frame for action? Does the customer have a positive vision of the solution you offer?
- **Offer.** Do your products fit the customer's needs? Can you offer a solution that's unique? Have

you demonstrated the value of your organization's solution?

- **Opportunity.** Do you have access to the people who can make the buying decision? Do those people recognize the need for a solution to their problem? Are you in control of the buying situation?
- **Commitment.** What do you risk by pursuing the sale at this point? What do you stand to gain in the short term and the long range? Is forming a relationship with this customer valuable to your organization?

—Adapted from *The New Solution Selling*, by Keith M. Eades (McGraw-Hill)

Sales managers get mixed marks from salespeople

“Stop fooling yourself” may be the advice to take from a survey of over 6,000 sales professionals by Equation Research. “Get some more management training” is a gentler lesson. Either way, salespeople don’t seem inclined to give their managers very high marks. Here’s how participants responded when asked to characterize their managers’ performance:

Superior	17 percent
Satisfactory	45 percent
Fair	26 percent
Poor	7 percent
Didn’t say	5 percent

In the survey, 43 percent said they think their managers could do with better sales management skills.

— Adapted from research conducted by Sales Performance International, Charlotte, N.C.

Safe on spam? Think again

If you think you’re doing everything legal to comply with the new spam regulations that went into effect on January 1 of this year, you may be mistaken. A study looking at 750 businesses that market using e-mail found that 50 percent don’t fully understand the law’s requirements, and 47 percent aren’t sure if their current e-mail practices are within the law. Here are the basics of the CAN-SPAM laws:

Your organization’s e-mails must . . .

1. Be targeted with an opt-out mechanism.
2. Originate from a functioning address that can receive a return message.
3. Indicate that the message is an advertisement from a legitimate business.

4. Contain a valid subject line.
 5. Include an accurate physical mailing address.
- Check with a lawyer to see if your organization is in compliance.

— Adapted from research conducted by Blue Sky Factory, Inc., Baltimore

Online business travel bookings on the upswing

Booking business travel online is becoming an increasingly popular practice. About 23 percent of corporate travel bookings are done through the Internet, accounting for some \$18.8 billion worth of air, hotel, and car rental expenditures. That’s out of a total of about \$80.9 billion overall for U.S. business travel. Online bookings will probably expand to 38.5 percent of total travel by 2006, translating into \$36.5 billion in business.

— Adapted from “Away on business: Online booking grows,” by Michael Conlon, on Yahoo! News

Treat salespeople like kids? Maybe . . .

Firstborn children tend to make better salespeople, says one researcher, but that doesn’t mean you should start asking sales applicants to include a family tree with their résumé. Psychologist Thomas Connellan says parents treat firstborns the way smart managers treat top employees: “They insist on accountability, they have higher expectations, and they give feedback.” You don’t have to hire firstborns, Connellan advises, just treat your salespeople like them.

— Adapted from the PR Web Web site

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Use management meetings to boost your profile

One way to enhance your position with upper management is to make a point of speaking at every management meeting you attend. Take a creative approach. Use slides or PowerPoint to deliver sales figures; hold a pop quiz to highlight new challenges for the company; play a taped interview with a customer to introduce ideas for new products or services. You'll get a boost in your stature and a reputation for being an innovative thinker.

—Adapted from “Don't dread management meetings; rather, see them as an opportunity,” by Kenneth J. Rawley, in the *Business Review*

For best results from sales letters, know when to go long

How long should a sales letter be? That depends on several factors. Generally speaking, a letter of one or two pages is best for generating leads. You can go into more details when your salesperson meets with a prospect. Use a longer letter if you're selling products or services that require a high degree of customer involvement, like financial products, that customers will want a lot of information about before buying.

—Adapted from “The long and short of copywriting,” by Paul Tracy, on the PR Web Web site

Question performance problems to target improvements

When a salesperson's performance slips, you need to take action. Observe his or her work habits and analyze the problem using these simple questions:

- **What should the person start doing?** *Ex.:* Qualify prospects earlier in the process
- **What should he or she stop doing?** *Ex.:* Calling on customers without a clear goal for the meeting in mind
- **What should the salesperson do differently?** *Ex.:* Ask questions that target business issues, not personal ones (hobbies, family, etc.)
- **What difference will it make?** *Ex.:* Increase the salesperson's closing rate—and bonus

—Adapted from *Making Sales Manager*, by Robert Nesbit and Arthur Miller (Probus)

Gain support for your Web site

Your organization's Web site can be a powerful tool for sales and marketing. It needs to be focused on the right issues, of course. Here's how to set it on the right track and keep it there:

- 1. Get company stakeholders on your side.** If you treat the Web site as your personal toy, no one else in the organization will back your requests for funding or assistance. Go to the stakeholders in your company—your own sales force, your superiors, other departments—and find out what they want so you can tailor the Web site to meet their needs as well. Then they'll have an interest in seeing it succeed.
- 2. Target your Web audience.** What do you want your Web site to do? The answer will help you identify the type of visitors you're trying to attract. If you're selling merchandise on the Web, you want to design a site with secure protections for credit card payments, for instance. If you're trying to attract advertisers, you may want to stress ease of navigation to entice people to click through to as many pages as possible.
- 3. Prioritize your goals.** Look at what your internal stakeholders want, and what your most desired customers want. Work together with your colleagues to determine what's most important and what's secondary. Make sure everyone's position gets considered; people will generally accept decisions if they understand the reasoning behind them.
- 4. Identify what you want to measure.** Once you've settled on your Web site's goals, figure out how you'll measure success. If you're trying to generate sales, are you most interested in total dollar value, dollars per visitor, units sold, or some other metric? This will drive the decisions you need to make about the tools you need.
- 5. Don't overload your stakeholders.** Generating dozens of data-filled reports will likely just confuse and frustrate the people whose support you need. Pick and choose the information they need to see—but let them know you can provide more if they want it.

—Adapted from “10 steps to measuring Web site success,” by Jim Sterne, on the MarketingProfs Web site

Win customers' trust online

The Web may not be as new and wild as it used to be, but your customers still need reassurance that they're dealing with a reputable company. Here are some things you can do to increase your credibility:

- **Get your own domain name.** Even if you're a small company, it's worth the investment to get a domain name and e-mail account like acme.com instead of depending on a lengthy one through an online service like Yahoo! or Geocities. Your site will look much more professional.
- **Complete contact information.** Don't hide behind a P.O. box and a nameless e-mail address. Provide a street address, phone number,

and the names of people inside your organization so customers will know they're dealing with real people. And make this information easy to find on your site.

- **Include a privacy policy.** Tell visitors and customers what you're doing with the information you collect, and why. Don't demand loads of personal information from people who want to browse your Web site. Provide mail and phone options for ordering so people can avoid putting personal data online if they choose.

—Adapted from “Increase sales by building credibility,” by Shelley Lowery, on the Door 2 the Future Web site