



Increase Your Sales — One Step At A Time

*Start with these
five suggestions.*

Every year, small businesses set goals for increasing sales revenues — and 2007 is no different. Ideally, these companies want to increase sales without having margins suffer or profitability decline. Most companies go about this without having a real plan. By the by, the CEO saying, “We are going to increase sales by 25%,” is not a plan. There are a number of things you can do to boost your sales, without killing margins and profits. It’s all about having a plan — made up of many small steps — that will get you there.

1) Sell more to your existing clients.

My very first article for SUPPLY HOUSE TIMES discussed increasing sales to your existing clients at length. Now it is time to revisit this idea. You already know these clients, your truck already delivers there, they like you and pay in a timely fashion. The problem with long-standing clients is a severe case of the “same-old, same-old.” The sales guy has sold the same stuff to the same guys for years. Your company has changed; there’s a very good chance that your old reliable customers have no idea that you offer a wider range of products and services now. And if your company has changed, it is a really good bet your customers have changed too. Meaning, they may require new products and services — ones that they had no use for even as recently as a few years ago. They may have expanded, bought out other firms, been bought out, opened new offices, changed or expanded their business. Early 2007 is as good a time as any to reintroduce your company, your products and services to your loyal customers. It is also time to learn much more about them.

2) Shake up your sales guys.

Selling the same old stuff the same old way is not going to do the trick. It may be time to shake up the sales guys. Your sales guys aren’t clones — they have different approaches, personalities and expertise. You need consistency from them, and yet at the same time you need to take the best advantage of each of their talents. Training and teaming will answer

nicely. Each month, dedicate a meeting to a vendor presentation. Require all sales staff to attend; start building up the overall expertise of the group. When possible, allow a vendor to visit customers on a sales call. Develop a simple sales reporting template to be filled out each week. The template should include: name of company, contact person, and the products and services discussed during the sales meeting.

Sales guys tend to think of themselves as lone wolves — out in the cruel world, living by their wits, selling their hearts out. Creating sales teams is an effective way to get cross-fertilization on a sales call. Two heads can be better than one — and it will definitely shake up the same old routine. You will need to address “team” compensation. I once worked for a company that split bonuses into three factors: 1/3 of the bonus was based on how well the company did, 1/3 was based on how well my group did and the final 1/3 was based on my individual performance. This encouraged me to do things that were good for the company and my group. It certainly fostered teamwork and suppressed some of the lone wolf tendencies that consultants have.

Put your existing customers into three categories and develop simple sales strategies for getting more business.

■ **Their business with you is growing:** You want the sales guy to be right on top of these guys. Where is their business expanding? What products and services will they need? How can you be the go-to PVF house of choice in the future?

■ **Their business with you is stable:** This sounds like the classic case of both the sales guy and the buyer being in a serious rut. Try teaming another salesperson with the original sales guy and shake it up.

■ **Their business with you is going down:** Either they are in trouble or they are going somewhere else for their PVF. It is time to learn why they have strayed and what you need to do to get them back.

3) Look at your products and services.

Maybe you were the leader in offering 48-hour service five years ago. Perhaps you were the only

supply house to carry a full line of copper tube and fittings in your area. Things change. Do you know what the local (and national) competition is offering these days? It's time to find out. Get a market study done. Surf the Web. Talk to your customers. It may be time to add a vendor or a product line. It is definitely time to offer more services — managed inventory, monthly billing, chemical content documentation, regular delivery times/days, specialized packaging, work site delivery, etc.

4) Update, upgrade your sales materials.

Supply houses are not famous for having a bunch of aspiring Hemingways in their midst. Their sales materials (brochures, presentations) are often less than stellar. Worse, after going through the painful exercise of writing all that stuff, they think they are done! Nope. Brochures and presentations have a shelf life; they get really old, really fast. Your sales guys are bored with them and so are your customers. Writing decent copy is tough and bad copy is worse than none at all. Your materials need to be professional, informative and compelling. Go outside — hire someone to do it. You don't have to update your materials every day, but certainly they need to be updated a few times a year.

5) Create and keep an active Web site.

You don't have a Web site? Develop one now. Soon — if you don't exist on the Web, you don't exist. You can start with a one-page site, with your company name, address, contact info and a brief description of your products and services. You will build on that later.

You have a Web site? Good! Make sure it covers the basics (see above).

Now you need to make it dynamic. You want your customers (and prospective customers) to visit your site frequently. If the information never changes, they have no reason to visit or revisit. Each month, offer some service or product at a special sales price for Web customers or present a brief vendor interview or even offer a short newsletter to visitors who sign in. At some point you will want to use your Web site for online sales. You want to make visiting your Web site a habit for your customers as soon as possible. This way, when you introduce a new product or service, your regular Web visitors will be informed without having to wait for a sales call. A well-written, well-designed Web site increases your visibility in the market and builds customer confidence.

Increasing your sales is a never-ending, ever-changing journey, one that starts with the first step. You don't have to do it all at once — but being static is not an option. Make a plan, decide which steps you want to take first, then go for it. And feel free to email me at any time for recommendations for market studies, copy writers and Web site developers. <<

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