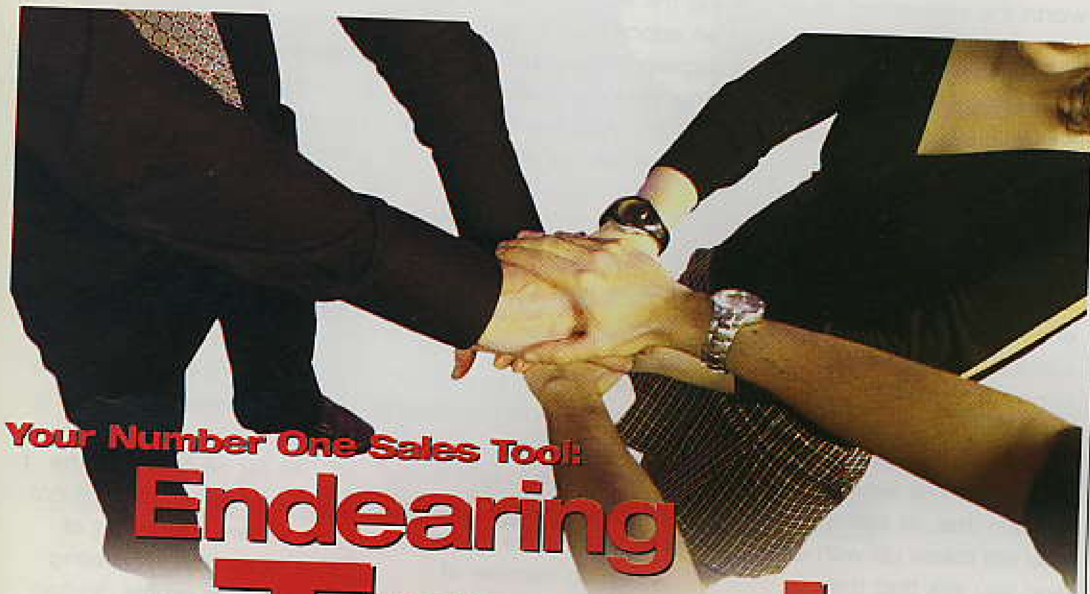
salesstrategies

SALES ISSUE



Your Number One Sales Tool: Endearing Trust

The number one method to enhance sales success can be summed up in one word: TRUST. The research is out and the experts agree that turning prospects into paying customers is all about developing "trusting relationships." Sound easy? Think again.

The most successful staffing firms in business today are not simply lobbing calls into companies with a 20:1 connect ratio. Successful staffing firms have a strict and in-depth selling methodology that focuses not on selling temporary staffing, but developing long-term trusting relationships.

"This concept is not new," states David Searns of Haley Marketing. He has customers who have experienced a 5,000% return on their marketing investment. "When you enhance your selling activity with a relationship marketing program, several things happen. You stay Top of Mind with your prospect base first of all. Additionally, your firm never runs out of things to say to your prospects - ways that you can provide value. The result is an increase in sales."

Most staffing firms have tried, with limited success, postcard mailing campaigns, candy programs, phone blitzing and the like. Endearing trust via a sales relationship marketing approach is the only sure way to increase your firm's face-to-face appointment, number of proposals presented and deals completed. Here is a simple approach to think about adding to your existing sales activity.

Customer Profile

The first thing to do is develop a customer profile. Take a look at your best customers and determine if you can find any similarities between these customers; for example, number of employees in the business, revenue range, industry sectors, organization structure, common capabilities, common lacking capabilities, etc.

Once this information is gathered, then a customer profile can be developed for your company's sales force. This profile is used to purchase mailing lists and access networking events. Ultimately, you don't want your sales executives making 100 phone calls a day connecting with only five prospects. You want your sales executives making 25 calls a day to prospects that fit your company's customer profile, and making 10 or 15 connects a day.

Customer Research

The next thing to do is to meet with your best clients to find out what is keeping them up at night. Most likely, it will not have anything to do with staffing. It will probably have something to do with creating efficiencies within their company or increasing employee productivity, or staying one step ahead of the competition.

Very quickly you will collect a list of key issues that your prospective clients are concerned about. This list is golden. You can develop a trusting relationship by assisting with a prospect's greatest concern or challenge. When you help in any way with a prospective client's big concern, you are communicating to them that you are acting in their best interest. Hence, you are developing a trusting relationship.

Publishing Added – Value Information

The next thing to do is hire a temp, a stay-at-home Mom or stay-at-home Dad who has the expertise in writing. It isn't necessary to hire or contract with a high-priced writer.

Have the contract writer take the list of concerns you collected from your customer base and develop a series of added value pieces: An 8.5 x 11 form, front and back, printed on semi-glossy paper. You want hard copy, not an e-mail. Each piece is typically themed and includes a case study, a list of Web sites for further information, maybe an association to contact, a book reference, etc. You want to include information that your prospect will not throw away – an informational piece that they will want to refer back to or pass on to other peers in their organization.

Sales Letters

The next step is to generate a series of high-quality sales letters that accompany the added-value information. These sales letters follow a certain format. It is well worth the investment in an expert at this point. Sales letter writing is truly an art and a skill that is not found in the capabilities of most staffing firms.

The sales letters do not talk about your staffing services. Rather, they introduce to your prospect the series of added-value information pieces. Your sales letters suggest how they might use the information or pass the information along within their company. The letters also explain that, at some point, you will follow up with a call, and you ask that they accept your call.

Follow-Up Calls

After sending two or three added-value pieces, which include a personalized letter, a call is made to the prospect. The goal of this call is two-fold: (1) to find out if the prospect has been reading the added-value informational pieces and if these issues are a concern of your prospect, and (2) to obtain permission to continue to send them information. If the person with whom you are speaking is not the best contact, then seek an internal referral. Ask who might be the best person within your prospective client organization to receive the information.

Only after a couple of calls and/or conversations, and when you sense it is the right time, the person working the account will ask for an appointment. You want to explain to your prospect how your firm has been able to save your existing customers money or resolve specific challenges or increase productivity, etc. Ask the question in a way that is hard to deny. For example, "We have developed a specific fulfillment process that has saved our existing customers an average of 22% on their existing staffing expense. Is this something that you would like to learn more about?"

A certain number of requests will result in a refusal to meet. "We are completely happy with our existing vendors." "I see no need to meet as our firm does not have a need at this time." We have all heard these responses. And in these cases, the permission to continue to send information will help you keep your staffing service Top Of Mind to this group within your prospect base.

A certain number of requests will result in an appointment. Your firm has to fully train your sales executives on how to conduct face-to-face appointments and interviews so that they fully utilize this opportunity.

The Results

Statistics on this program are incredible. If you follow this process, your firm will obtain face-to-face appointments with over 80% of your prospects.

It makes sense. You have warmed up your prospect. You have differentiated your business from other vendors. You have not sold staffing services per se. You have obtained a level to Top Of Mind awareness. Your sales executives have become more then order takers. You have, in fact, made a sincere attempt to develop long-term trusting relationships.

As far as following the process exactly, this is not necessary. The heart of this approach is creating a customer profile, finding out what is keeping them up at night, creating added-value informational pieces for them, and then making a commitment to following up with your prospect.

If you are interested in learning more about the detail of such an approach, then I have three recommended sources for you: One-to-One Marketing, by Peppers & Rogers; Permission Marketing, by Seth Godin; and Relationship Marketing, by Regis McKenna. **SI**

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