

► COMMENTARY

# Increasing Sales...

without increasing your sales staff



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**W**hen it comes to selling, many of us have operated under the old rule of thumb that it takes three contacts to get on our prospect's radar screen, and at least seven before they are ready to consider us. We have all heard horror stories that up to 80 percent of leads are never followed up on. Also, that most sales people, under the pressure of delivering results NOW, don't ever reach the third contact, let alone the seventh where all the action is supposed to take place.

But in today's world of complex sales cycles, more like eight to 10 contacts are required. At the same time pressure for immediate results has not gone away. In many cases the direction from sales managers is to simply make more calls, which is not the solution given already busy schedules.

Clearly we cannot continue to operate the way we have in the past and hope for better results. And the answer is not in adding staff to recognize the additional number of contacts required to make a sale. So what is the answer?

A lot of salespeople chase the five percent of the market that is looking to buy right now. On the other hand, 75 to 100 percent of their prospects will buy over a period of time. So, should they chase the five percent along with everyone else, or be part of a smaller group establishing a relationship with the far larger group who eventually will buy? While the answer may appear obvious, strategies and tactics to accomplish this seem to be beyond what many are able to take on after a hard day trying to make more calls.

Today there are tools available to do the heavy lifting in the new sales process. This tactic uses technology in addition to personal contacts to educate a prospect over time as to why they should choose you when it comes time to buy. By supplying the prospect with helpful, relevant and timely information, the salesperson's credibility begins to build so that when they actually make a personal contact it is not seen as a dreaded cold call.

Technology offers the opportunity to take time-consuming letter writing, email, and follow-up off the salesperson's plate and allows them to spend more time closing deals. This helps



make salespeople more successful which aids in retention and recruitment because they get to do what they do best and love most.

What it does require is the time and effort to think through a longer-term comprehensive, integrated marketing and sales strategy—one in which all components work together to deliver a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Each contact must be thought through as part of an overall plan with a specific need of the prospect in mind. While it requires more work invested up-front, it offers bigger payoffs for years to come because the same strategy can be used to remind current customers why they should continue to do business with you.

There are many good Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Sales Force Automation (SFA) tools available to meet the needs and budget of any size company. The best news is it doesn't have to translate to "expensive."

Whether you call it "nurture marketing" or "relationship marketing," if done correctly, your salespeople will build greater credibility with prospects, be perceived as more professional, with the result that you will distinguish your company from your competitors who are still just trying to make more calls. Meanwhile, you have the opportunity to double the productivity of your sales force without adding one extra person—something that will look very good on your bottom line. **MB**

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