

# Sales Effectiveness in a Slow Economy

## TUNE YOUR SALES ENGINE FOR PEAK PERFORMANCE

by Danita Bye

In manufacturing, nothing is made until a sale is made. If a manufacturing business were an automobile, the sales and marketing departments would be the engine; the driving force that moves the entire organization forward. So take care when you're considering cuts in those departments. Cut too deeply and you may not have enough horsepower left to take you through this recession.

In times as tough as these, cuts are unavoidable, and it seems reasonable to make those cuts across the board. But tough times are when you need the motive power of your sales and marketing departments most. These days, instead of stalling your entire business by dropping the revs on your sales engine, it's best to tune it with an increased focus on target markets and a redoubled emphasis on coaching your team in the characteristics needed to beat a bad economy.

### Increase Sales Revenue With a Targeted Marketing Strategy

Focus the resources you already have on a well-defined target market; marketing and sales are finite resources. Go after every market opportunity that presents itself and you'll find yourself spread so thin and your marketing so diluted that you'll actually hurt your bottom line.

I've seen it time and again, both in my own businesses and in my consulting work: When you focus your marketing and sales efforts on a limited but carefully considered market, your return on investment (ROI) goes up, advertising becomes more effective, and you gain the clout and referrals that come along with being regarded as a specialist.

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### Coach Your Salespeople to Maximize Performance

In the same way that not every manufacturer is suited to every market, not every salesperson possesses the personal characteristics and skills needed to sell effectively in an economy like this one. That's why so many salespeople who burned up the sales track just a few years ago are stalled out and directionless today. And it's also why coaching your salespeople in the following areas is more necessary now than ever:

**Desire** – Salespeople with this quality don't "have to"; they "want to."

Because they're motivated by money, prestige, and an overwhelming urge to be the best, they do what's necessary to reach their own goals—goals which are often loftier than yours.

**Commitment** – There's an old saying: "If wishes were horses, beggars would ride." Desire, while necessary, is not sufficient. To succeed, salespeople must be committed to doing what others won't. They must be willing to risk security for reward. They have to push hard enough that they risk hearing "no."

**Accountability** – I call this quality a "responsibility reflex," an automatic willingness to be held accountable for failure and expect recognition for success. In contrast to salespeople who blame outside factors in a knee-jerk fashion, salespeople with the responsibility reflex refuse to rationalize or externalize. They accept challenges and relish being held accountable for—and rewarded for—their efforts.

### Comfortable talking about money—

When it comes right down to it, money's what business is about, right? To sell in this economy, a salesperson has to be comfortable with that and be able to bring up the subject in a forthright, confident and timely fashion. The successful salesperson knows the value of what they sell and won't beat around the bush when it comes to talking dollars and cents. They've come to terms with the fact that their value to their own company lies in the revenue they create.

**Little need for approval** – I've yet to come across anyone who didn't appreciate a pat on the back from time to time, but the best salespeople don't let a need for approval get in the way of making the sale. They'll ask the tough questions and won't accept waffling answers. They will ask for the business and risk getting shot down. They won't stand for put offs, stall outs and unclosed sales.

When the economy is sputtering, tuning your sales engine for peak performance takes precedence over cuts. By narrowing your market focus and training your sales team in the qualities needed to succeed when the road is rocky, you'll be giving yourself the green light for better sales now and record-beating performance when the market accelerates again. PM



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