SALES AND SERVICE
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THE MAGAZINE OF TEAM LEADERSHIP

DECEMBER 2008

Rev Up
## Revenue

## Meetings
The High Tech Future

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Five Steps to
## Sales Recovery

**Linda Bishop**
**Consultant**

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MANAGEMENT/COMMUNICATION

# The Future of Meetings

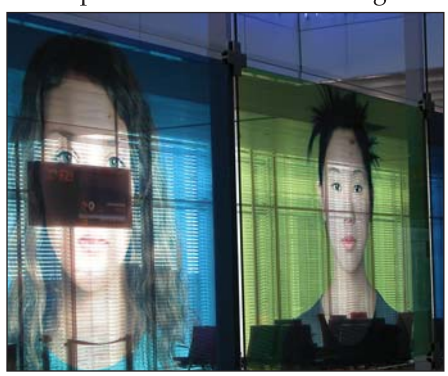
***Use technology to boost sales and profits.***

**by Daniel Burrus**

RISING GAS PRICES, AIRLINE cutbacks, canceled and delayed flights, and skyrocketing travel costs are just a few of the challenges facing business today. As a result, more companies are looking for ways to eliminate or at least greatly reduce travel expenses, and they're re-examining how they'll conduct meetings in the future.

Trying to eliminate meeting expenses is not a new concept for business. After 9/11, the airlines temporarily shut down. When the airports reopened, many people were afraid to fly. In response, companies rushed to try virtual meetings—namely video conferencing and Web conferencing—in an attempt to save time and money. But the tools available had limitations. On a personal PC, video conferencing was slow due to low bandwidth speeds that made the video fuzzy. High-quality systems were confined to a few video conferencing rooms. Web conferencing, using audio, text messaging, and PowerPoint, was useful but limited.

Also, people tended to overreact and do all meetings virtually. Since no one had "meeting guidelines," managers learned some hard lessons—that there are times when you need to see someone face to face, there are times when an audio conference will do, and there are times when an email is perfectly fine. With diminished meeting outcomes due to the lack of guidelines, video conferencing and Web conferencing went back to playing a minor role as companies reverted to traveling for



their meeting needs.

Fortunately, people didn't completely abandon video and Web conferencing. Companies use video and Web conferencing today more than ever before because they discovered the technology. Now it's time for organizations to step it up a notch and use the new meeting technology—not only to save costs, but also to build relationships.

## The Future of Relationships

Many companies are going into crisis mode. Since air travel and gas costs are high, they're using video and Web conferencing, as well as the new high-end videoconferencing called telepresence offered by Cisco and HP, to save travel money. However, if their only motivation is to save money on travel, rather than enhance communication and collaboration, then they're simply creating another fad. Video conferencing has evolved tremendously, and companies need to use today's technology to pave the path to future profits—all of which hinge on relationships.

To add fuel to the fire is the fact that rising travel costs have been heading down recently due to the global recession, but this is temporary. Increasing global energy consumption will come back strong. Therefore, smart companies are changing how they think about meetings and the new video conferencing technology, and they're realizing that it offers something more powerful than they've had in the past. They are thinking in terms of "visual communications" rather than simply video and Web conferencing.

Visual communications heighten the bond you have with someone when you can't see them face to face. It

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adds dimension to the communication. There's a reason why you shake someone's hand when you meet them: The more senses you involve, the higher the connection. Those companies that can enhance their communication, both internally and externally, are the ones who can cause change faster and stay competitive longer.

## Making Visual Communications Work

Before you mandate that video conferencing be the only way of conducing meetings, consider the following three principles of visual communications.

• ***The need to meet, establish relationships, and share information, knowledge, and wisdom won't go away.*** No amount of high-tech gadgetry will change that fact. That's why face-to-face meetings are still the dominant form of meeting and extremely relevant, because there is no better way to build trust. In our increasingly global marketplace, trust is the glue that creates strong, successful, and enduring business relationships. Those who believe video conferencing will end face-to-face meetings are using "either/or" thinking, which often occurs when dazzling new technologies first appear. They view the new thing as destined to totally supplant the old thing, except that rarely happens.

• ***Companies that make visual communications work will have the new and old coexisting by allowing each to do what it does best.*** Video conferencing is a superb tool for saving travel time and expense, focusing on a structured agenda, obtaining points of view in real-time, building consensus, and making announcements. It's not good for smoothing out contentious give-and-take or handling emotional or sensitive issues. Fortunately, both virtual meetings and face-to-face meetings are now available. It's not either/or anymore.

• ***In the past, video conferencing required a big fancy room with expensive equipment—that's not the only option for video anymore.*** Many new computers come with a built-in video camera. You can do video conferencing on a personal laptop from your desk, home, or anywhere. The software is free and comes with your system. And with some computers, you can have multiple people on at the same time and video conference with them all at once.

## Goal Determines the Technology Role

The future of business includes an interdependent world that generates increasing quantities of data, information, knowledge, and wisdom that companies need to communicate. The key is to develop guidelines for determining what type of meeting to have. You must look at the meeting's goal.

Before you plan a meeting, ask yourself, "What is this meeting's goal? Is it to inform, motivate, inspire, persuade, influence, sell, gain trust, negotiate, gain respect, establish new relationships, strengthen existing relationships, share information, share knowledge and experiences, gain credibility, change how people think, solve a problem, determine a strategy, or create dialogue?" Thinking about the goal for the meeting in this way makes it easier to decide what type of meeting will be best and what technology is best.

Once you know the meeting goal, use these guidelines.

• ***If the goal is primarily to inform by sharing data and information,*** then a meeting may not be necessary. It might be far better to use email, groupware, a wiki, a blog, or an Intranet or Extranet and let people collect and absorb the information at their own rate and in their own time.

• ***If sharing the information at the same time with everyone would be best,*** consider audio conferencing or web-conferencing as an alternative to a face-to-face meeting.

• ***If the information delivery will primarily be one-way,*** then an e-conference would serve the purpose. If, however, informing involves hands-on demonstrations or high interactivity, then a face-to-face meeting is definitely in order.

• ***If the goal is to influence, build relationships, share knowledge and experiences, gain credibility, solve a problem, or determine a strategy,*** a face-to-face meeting is best, but it's not the only option. High-end videoconferencing telepresence systems and satellite-broadcast services that use full-motion video could help you meet your goals. If all participants have access to broadband connections, web-conferencing offers another attractive option. Audio-conferencing could also be a viable option, depending on the number of people and degree of interactivity required.

• ***If the goal is to gain trust or respect, or to inspire, motivate, persuade, establish relationships, negotiate, or change how people think,*** then a face-to-face meeting is a must. If this is not possible, then use telepresence video conferencing rooms. They typically have three huge curved screens and a fourth screen above for shared work, custom lighting and acoustics, and life-size images.

Successful meetings will depend on your ability to leverage old and new tools to build trusting relationships that foster communication, collaboration, and community. SSE

*Daniel Burrus is CEO of Burrus Research and author of six books, including* Technotrends. *Visit www.burrus.com.*

*ACTION: Use technology to improve your meetings.*


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Executive Excellence Publishing

# Product Demos

*Make them more effective.*


**by Tom Hopkins and Pat Leiby**

WISE SALESPEOPLE CONSTANTLY LOOK for better ways to make a point, win people's trust, or present their products. We teach an effective procedure for product presentations and demos. Read through the process with your product or service in mind and make adjustments in your presentation to incorporate these strategies.

Making this change will increase your closing ratio.

***Start by breaking down your product demo into features and benefits.*** *Features* are things such as colors, sizes, styles, locations and options. *Benefits* involve emotions. They are what the features will do for the client—enhance their lifestyle, increase productivity, save money, streamline a process.

***Present each feature in four steps:*** First, you state the FACT. Second, show the BENEFIT. Third, create URGENCY. Fourth, ask for FEEDBACK. Facts and benefits create the sale. Urgency and feedback make it happen now.

Urgency for each feature is something that you create. It doesn't involve being pushy or forcing your customer into a quick decision. Creating urgency requires effort and creativity to assure that your prospect feels a genuine need to make a purchase today because it just makes sense—not because of any practice of fear or intimidation.

In our seminars, we create urgency by offering special investments on products that are only valid the day of the seminar. It's the today-and-today-only method. Retail outlets use sales or offers where they indicate quantities are limited to create urgency—or they make offers for a limited time only. Investment counselors show charts and graphs of growth potential that is based on today's market figures. If the client wants to earn those returns, they should start their program today.

***Think about how you can create urgency with your product or service.*** What are the advantages to your clients in investing today rather than waiting 30 days, 90 days or a year? Are prices scheduled to go up? Will the current model be discontinued next year, and will the new model have many new features? Are there limited quantities available? Will they earn more and save more, because of your product so it just makes sense to start today? When your clients realize that you have their best interests at heart—that you're on their side—wanting them to make a decision not because you need to make a sale but because it's good for them, your sales ratios quickly improve.

***Asking for feedback serves two purposes***: 1) it enables you to monitor your progress in helping people make a wise decision, and 2) it helps you see if your potential client is ready for the next step—to close the sale.

## Two Examples

To help you see how the process works, here are two examples. Study them and customize the system to work for your product and customers.

***Example 1.*** Here's an example for the automobile industry:

FACT: "This hybrid engine has the most power of any made in the U.S."

This fact is simple and you can have documentation to prove it.

BENEFIT: "This engine will save you money without diminishing the power you enjoy with your current vehicle."

To discover the right benefit, put yourself in your customer's mind and ask "what's in it for me?" In this case, power is what's in it for him.

URGENCY: "This engine won't be an option on next year's truck, and even with the smaller engine there will be a higher sticker price on the new model. So, next year you'll pay more for the same model, but with less power." Without using high pressure, the salesperson has merely pointed out the advantage to making a purchase now. Buying now is clearly in the customer's best interest according to the customer's own definition of need.

FEEDBACK: "Since next year's model will look and ride exactly the same, which one would fit your needs and pocketbook the best?"

The answer is rather obvious, isn't it? With these four steps, the potential client should realize that, too, and be prepared to move to the next step in the system, which would be to discuss the money aspects of the sale.

***Example 2.*** Let's see how this works with a DVD system.

FACT: "This particular unit is a state-of-the-art DVD system."

BENEFIT: "It is the highest quality DVD available and will give you better picture and sound reproduction than anything else on the market."

URGENCY: "I have just two of these units in stock right now. One was returned because it was a gift and the recipient already had one. The package has been opened, but the unit hasn't been used. However, because it's been opened, I can give it to you at a lower amount with the same guarantee."

FEEDBACK: "Although the unit is new and never been used, the carton was opened. Technically, we can't sell it as new. Is having that carton opened something you can live with, if it would save you money?"

Creating urgency requires asking for feedback. If you don't get feedback, you may never discover the concerns until it is too late to address them.

When you get positive feedback during your presentation, your close becomes easier. Your customer is not an opponent to be overcome, but a partner to be helped. Even negative feedback is valuable if it lets you know where your customer stands.

Study and practice the techniques; research your client's real needs, wants, and concerns; and provide a unique solution to your client's unique situation.

When you use the system properly, the "math" will astound you. FACT + BENEFITS + URGENCY + FEEDBACK = SOLD TODAY, SOLD NOW.

Never give a product demo again without presenting the features in this manner: State the facts, show the benefits, create urgency and ask for feedback. By doing this, you'll serve more people, improve your closing ratio, and do it in less time. SSE

*Tom Hopkins and Pat Leiby are coauthors of* Sell It Today, Sell It Now—The Art of the One-Call Close. *Visit www.tomhopkins.com or call 800-528-0446.*

*ACTION: Improve your product demos.*

SERVICE/CULTURE

# Service Strategy

*Monitor your culture.*

**by Bob Livingston**

SERVICE IS NOW THE DETERmining factor in securing and maintaining relationships. In troubling times, relationships are tested, and only those who serve customers well survive.

Competitive differentiation prevails in turbulent times. Retailers and suppliers who treat their customers and clients badly are feeling the pressure.

Two factors—connection and convenience—are at the center of any service strategy. So, pay attention to how you serve your customers and clients.

Many great companies—Four Seasons, Marriott, Charles Schwab, General Electric, Container Store, Wachovia, Southwest Airlines and Apple—are defined by service quality. They use service as a bridge to loyalty and competitive differentiation. They place their customers first, train their associates, monitor their service culture for consistency in performance, and recognize those who serve well.

Three companies are benchmarks in Service Excellence: The Ritz-Carlton consistently ranks at or near the top in guest *satisfaction*. eBay is one of the most trusted companies *for* customer privacy. Saturns are among the top-ranked value-priced cars. These companies see service as a differentiator, set their direction accordingly, and develop a Service Excellence culture. This determination positions them well.

In these troubled times, those who embrace a change by *how* they conduct their business will achieve a competitive advantage. It's always preferable to be the first to the game, make the rules, and bring your own ball.

***FedEx Kinko's*** is an example of the first-adopter theory. In 1971, Fred Smith formed FedEx out of his frustration with the service he received when mailing packages. He determined that the time to deliver, lack of reliability, and methods used for shipping were unacceptable. He realized that assured delivery of packages was required. He was a visionary and a problem-solver.

FedEx became the first company in the delivery industry to create a business plan based on understanding customers' needs, envisioning future needs, and developing an approach to satisfying needs by reliably delivering packages to customers the next day.

By *how* he did what he did, Smith changed an industry and defined the service benchmarks; their competitors had no choice but to follow. FedEx considered that customers have two sets of needs: *hard needs*, satisfied by *what* they do, and *soft needs*, satisfied by *how* they do what they plan to do. FedEx knew that, first people need their mail, packages, and products to reach their destinations swiftly. In the FedEx model of overnight delivery, satisfying that need is paramount. It is a need satisfied by *what* they do. That is the satisfying of a *hard need*.

FedEx knew that people also need to feel confident, certain, and assured that packages would be delivered within the agreed-upon time frame. This need for worry-free delivery (an emotional need) is satisfied by *how* they do what they do (a *soft need*.)

Relationships with those you serve are based on these two sets of needs: hard needs, satisfied by *what* you do, (FedEx will deliver your package by 10 a.m. tomorrow) and soft needs, those intangible, emotion-based needs, satisfied by *how* you do what you do (FedEx makes you feel certain that your package will arrive the next day).

Customers are often less concerned about what a product or service delivers and more drawn by how the experience makes them feel. Embracing a service strategy gives them a reason to stand by you. Differentiate yourself by how you do what you do. SSE

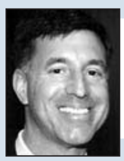
*Bob Livingston, former head of sales at The Lipton Company, is CEO of REL Communications and author of* How You Do . . . What You Do *(McGraw Hill). Visit www.mhprofessional.com.*

*ACTION: Differentiate yourself with service.*

PEOPLE/RETENTION

# Crack the Personality Code

*Attract and keep sales and service people.*



**by Dana and Ellen Borowka**

TO HIRE THE BEST SALES AND CUSTOMER service people and keep them on your team, you need to know what makes them tick. We believe the sales and customer service personality code can be cracked. Personality tests are a far more reliable predictor of performance than interviews and resumes.

Here are nine ways to use personality testing to attract and retain the right sales and service people.

***1. Get the real picture.*** Using a personality test, you learn about the person's ability to work well with others, tolerate stress, and solve problems. You can then make an informed decision about whether the person is a good fit for the job and team. And if you decide to hire the person, you'll know how best to manage him from day one.

***2. Help them be all that they can be.*** Every sales and service person has strengths and weaknesses. Use an objective measure to pinpoint the good and bad, and then place them in the right position and coach them.

***3. Take me to your leaders.*** Personality testing gives the manager and sales or service team a common language about how they like to interact and helps you train future managers on how to get the best out of the team.

***4. Know how to manage difficult people.*** Use personality assessments to diagnose potential sources of workplace conflict. The best way to deal with a problem is to prevent it.

***5. Get everybody to play nice.*** People often get frustrated with co-workers and wonder why everyone doesn't act like them. Using personality profiles, managers can coach employees how to interact better with their peers.

***6. Treat co-workers the way they want to be treated.*** Using personality assessments as the basis for team-building exercises can get everyone to have a healthy respect for other ways of seeing the world.

***7. Make managers better leaders.*** When managers know the personality traits of their people, they can better motivate teams, communicate change, and delegate authority.

***8. Pick better teams.*** Before you assemble a sales or service team, assess the strengths and weaknesses of team members. This can be the difference between a productive team that gets the job done and one that pulls apart.

***9. Set people up for success.*** You might hire the right employees but put them in the wrong job. Understanding preferred work styles improves retention and productivity.

Personality assessments help you to hire great people and keep them! SSE

*Dana and Ellen Borowka are coauthors of* Cracking the Personality Code. *Email reception@lighthouseconsulting.com or call 310-453-6556, ext 403.*

*ACTION: Use personality assessments.*

# Maximize Your Price

***Use the value/benefit equation.***

**by Mark Hunter**

PRICE INCREASES OCCUR faster now, driven in part by the rising costs of labor and materials.

However, the main reason for price increases could stem from the *value* of the products or services you're selling —not the *cost* associated with them. Sadly, many companies are leaving billions of dollars of profit on the table because they base their pricing on cost, not the value/benefit equation.

Why should anyone pay more for something than the amount incurred to produce it? For many companies, this seems like a logical question. They determine the cost of their goods and services from a cost-plus model which says that the price you charge should not be out of line with what it costs you to produce it. However, if this was true for all items, we'd all be paying a lot less for tickets to concerts and sporting events, as well as computer software and DVDs. When you see that the real profit is made by pricing their items according to the value/ benefit of what the customer is going to receive from your product or service, your bottom line will reflect it.

## The Value/Benefit Equation

I find that the best companies more confidently price their products based on the value/benefit equation. The value/benefit equation is built on understanding the benefits that customers will realize from using your product or service. To discover these, a salesperson needs to ask them questions during the sales process to ascertain how their product or service will be used. Do not equate value to low-price. The best value is many times the highest price (or at least what appears to be the highest price initially). Take, for example, the price to fly from New York to Los Angeles. You might take a bus across the country for less money, but the value/benefit equation would be low because of the time it would take. Flying would cost more initially, but provide you with far more time once you reached your destination.

As a salesperson, never be steam-rolled into a price increase discussion with a customer who is centered on raw costs. Whenever you present a price increase, always begin by asking them questions about the benefits they receive from what you provide them. This allows the customer to better understand the importance of you and your company to them. Encourage them to explain how you impact their business. Get the customer to share with you something specific and unique about how you help them. Then, ask them follow-up questions based on what they tell you. Their responses will reiterate the fact that you and your company are an important asset to them. Once you achieve this dialogue, you can then share your price increase. Because they realize how crucial you are to their success, they'll be less likely to raise objections. You'll achieve the value/benefit equation and the higher price you deserve.

By focusing your customer's attention on the value/benefits your products or services offer, you help them see that they need to continue in business with you because of how you contribute to their success.

## The Price Increase Switching Game

We all deal with price increases, and face belligerent customers who won't accept the price increase and threaten to switch to a competitor. I find that when customers are presented with a price increase, they will only change to a competitor about 10 percent of the time. The reason is simple: the cost of switching to a new supplier is too great. When a customer threatens to make the move, rarely have they thought through what they're really saying. Their goal is to get the weak-kneed salesperson to cave in and give them a discount, and many of them are successful in securing on-the-spot price reductions just because of the forcefulness of their veiled warning of switching.

When you are presented with the threat of a customer moving to another supplier because of a price increase, focus on the cost of the conversion. The switch is never as easy as they think it will be. Look at what they'll have to go through to set up and start receiving from a new vendor. Now, take this and multiply it by four. The reality is that the customer is not just setting up a new vendor, but also phasing out an old one in addition to dealing with the wide-range of conversion issues that inevitably arise.

To better sense the risk involved in making the change, think about the hassle you go through when you try to alter a flight on the same airline or your cell phone plan even if you stay with the same carrier. Consider what is necessary to adjust your auto insurance or to reschedule medical tests. Think of the added work you'd have if you were not just changing plans, but also changing companies. You'd think twice about making a switch.

Now think about the work required for a business to change to another supplier. It's easy for a customer to say they're going to drop you and go with someone else, but at that point, it's only talk. Threatening you doesn't cost them anything—carrying it out actually will. The decision to switch is not just about the absolute cost. It takes time to make a switch, thus carrying an added element of risk.

The next time your customers threaten to leave you, research what it would cost them. Next, figure out how long it would take for them to get a payback, let alone ROI. In most cases, it will be hard for them to realize any return just from switching because of a price variance. Even if your customers could achieve a ROI, could they guarantee the other company's pricing wouldn't change? Could the other supplier guarantee the same level of service you provide? Could the other company provide the same sales leadership that you bring to them?

Usually, the threat of customers to change suppliers because of price increase dies quickly when they stop to consider the cost of making the switch. Once they see that there is more time, effort, and money at stake, the change is less appealing. So, do your homework, and show them the switch is not worth it. SSE

*Mark Hunter, "The Sales Hunter", is a sales consultant. Visit www.TheSalesHunter.com.*

*ACTION: Apply the value/benefit equation.*

SALES/RECOVERY

# Resurrect the Dead

***Five steps to sales recovery.***

**by Linda Bishop**

FOR MANY YEARS, ONE OF Mike's best customers was a large bank. He loved them and thought they loved him, too.

Then, sales began to slip. The bank didn't call as often. He noticed, but didn't react. He didn't ask what was going on, or why the situation had changed. No one complained about quality or price, so Mike assumed the situation would turn around.

One day Mike realized that this customer was dead. Worse, he had killed them with neglect and indifference.

This story has a happy ending. Mike worked hard and resurrected his dead client. He continued to do business with them for the next decade.

Everyone has dead customers and resurrecting them can be the shortest route to new sales. Dead customers represent qualified leads. You already know they buy what you sell. Often, they will buy it from you a second time if you go out and re-sell them.

Learn from Mike's mistake. Follow this easy five-step plan for bringing dead customers back to life.

***Step 1: List dead accounts.*** List your dead accounts and make notes on what you know. Why did the account die? Was there a problem with quality, pricing, or personnel? Was neglect the cause? For now, don't worry about the odds of resurrection. Just make the list, read it once, and put it aside for 24 hours. Let your brilliant subconscious mind work on the problem.

***Step 2: Find out if the contact is current.*** After a few days, get out the list and make calls. Talk to receptionists. Tell them you're updating files—the truth—and you want to ensure information is current. Get the name of the buyers and their title. Confirm phone numbers and email addresses. Be friendly, upbeat, and positive. Often you discover the old buyer is gone. The slate has been wiped clean, and you're selling to someone new.

***Step 3: Send the buyer a letter.*** Whether you know the buyer or not, write a letter consisting of three paragraphs: explain why you're contacting the buyer; explain how you can help; thank the reader for their consideration and tell them when to expect a follow-up call. Include your business card and mail the letter. A letter is better than email or a phone call for initial contact. Customers get many calls and e-mails but few letters. Everyone knows it takes effort to write and mail a letter. People respect effort, and they appreciate it. Thus, letters stand out.

***Step 4: Follow-up.*** Learn when the letter will land on the ex-customer's desk. Call within 48 hours of the arrival time. If your target picks up the phone, great! Talk to them. Treat them as you would a new prospect, and try to get an appointment. If you get voicemail, leave a message. Briefly repeat what you said in the letter. Keep calling. After you have called several times, tell them if they would like you to stop calling all they have to do is pick up the phone and let you know they're not interested.

***Step 5: Go on appointments.*** If they agree to see you, do what you normally do during a sales call with a new prospect. Tell them about your company. Explain how you can help them.

At the end of the call, smile and say, "We've worked with you in the past, and would love to work with you again. How can we make that happen?"

This plan gets results. It's worth the effort to resurrect dead customers. Many of them will come back to life with a little nudging from you. Often, reviving them is quicker and easier than expected. Some dead customers aren't even dead—they are just hibernating, and one phone call is all it takes to awaken them! SSE

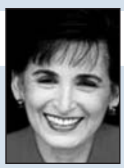
*Linda Bishop is an author, speaker and President of Thought Transformation. Call 770-846-3510 or email lindabishop@thoughttransformation.com.*

***ACTION: Recover your dead accounts.***

SALES/CLOSING

# It's Not About Closing

***Treat problems, not symptoms.***



**by Joanne S. Black**

I OFTEN HEAR THE COMPLAINT, "My salespeople can't close. We need a training program on closing the sale."

Save your money. It's never about closing. That's the symptom. The problem is the neglect the salesperson shows to all activities needed during earlier parts of the sales process. Poor closing is like back pain. You can stretch and put heat on an aching back, but unless you treat the cause of the pain (the problem)—a pulled muscle or degenerating disc—you'll still have back pain.

The closing process begins with introductions. How did you meet your prospect? Were you introduced by a trusted source? Were you pre-sold? Did you meet the prospect at a trade show, through cold calling, or through a web or direct-mail inquiry? The close rate will vary dramatically based on how the client was sourced.

***Start with lead sources.*** If salespeople are introduced through a referral, the close rate is at least 50 percent, and may be 70 percent or higher. Leads from other, less-direct sources have a 1 to 3 percent close rate. Traditionally, sales managers don't examine the source of leads as an important link to closing new business. I invite you to examine how you source leads as the first step to increase your close rate.

***Ask questions.*** You can enhance your close rate by understanding what your client really needs. What clients think they need and what they really need are often different. Clients rarely understand the true cause of their problem. Rather, they reach for the visible answer—the symptom. Treating the symptom won't solve the problem.

Asking thoughtful, provocative, and probing questions boosts your close rate and the amount of the sale. The scale of the project increases, and the client gets a solution that will actually solve his problem and create demonstrable business results. Your client looks good, and you're poised for more business.

***Give the prospect a task.*** Never leave a meeting or end a phone call with a list of things for you to do but nothing for your prospect to do. Everyone needs an assignment. Without one, your client isn't invested in the solution. You may ask him to provide you with materials to review, to conduct research, survey his internal team, or connect you with internal resources. Make sure your prospect has a task.

***Always leave your meeting with another meeting scheduled.*** If your prospect is noncommittal, you have likely been too quick to jump to a proposed solution. You haven't closed. Go back. It's never about closing. SSE

*Joanne Black is an expert on referral selling and founder of No More Cold Calling. Email joanne@nomorecoldcalling.com or visit www.nomorecoldcalling.com.*

***ACTION: Boost your closing ratio.***

# Loyal Customers

***Selling well in tough times.***

**by Ken Rogner**

TOUGH TIMES SEPARATE THE planners from plodders and these are tough times in the sales game! In these economic times, the sales people who are creating and holding onto loyal customers are the ones who first put the extra effort into knowing and internalizing their customer's goals and dreams. You can't build loyalty in customers unless you know and understand what your customers really value and today—loyalty equals success.

We know that just satisfying a customer's needs doesn't cut it anymore! We know that getting to the next level of customer loyalty is the key but do we know what makes it happen?

Let's turn *loyalty* into an acronym and use it to find the process for building loyalty in your customer base:

***Learn about the market:*** Do a market analysis using SWOT (strengths-weaknesses/opportunities-threats) or whatever method you prefer but dig out the details for your industry. Know which geographic territories are strong or weak, which competitors are underfunded or vulnerable, where your company's strengths and weaknesses lie. Then study trends. Know the economic and social trends that affect your market, know the demographic and regulatory trends and how they affect your customers. Know about new product trends and developments. Does weather and climate impact your industry? How about fuel prices? The devil is in these details and you need to know all the details to make intelligent plans. Brainstorm with the folks in your office, with your teammates, with your boss or with the other sales people in your company. Doing this research will pay off big-time at the end.

***Open our eyes to the customer's business:*** Unless we put the extra effort into knowing what our customer's goals and dreams are, we can't find avenues of help. If we want loyalty, we have to give of ourselves and focus our energies on helping our customer grow and prosper. Our dreams only happen if our customers achieve their dreams too! What is the best way to learn what her goals and dreams are? Ask questions. Think it through, don't ask questions that you can learn on your own (from the customer's website, from industry sources, or from your network of reps)—you will just look stupid. Ask questions about the impact of current conditions, about their competitive pressures, about their specific challenges. Sometimes your company won't have a solution, but a future development or new product may. The more you know, the stronger your relationship can be and the more important you become to the customer.

***Your job is to create value!*** What is of value to each of your customers is also different for each of them. If sharing the latest technology in your industry is important, be the techie! If helping with merchandising of her retail store is important, be the expert. If helping create an ad campaign is important, pull your resources together and be the ad-person. If you have expertise within your company that can help your customer, know where it is and make it available to your customer.

***Align your value offerings with the customer's goals and dreams:*** This is where the rubber meets the road! You take what you learned by asking intelligent questions and then spend time matching your company's offerings to your customer's needs. This is a marriage, and you are the matchmaker. You know the customer's goals and dreams and every one of your company's product and service offerings. Your job is to bring it all together.

***Let's demo:*** Show that you have the correct answer through demonstration and presentation of your product or service. A successful "demo of solution" is different for each of us, and this is the part that most of us do well. Our Marketing Department and Product Managers have given us all of the features and benefits we are supposed to present for each of the products or services we sell. Hopefully, we have also learned to first ask the right questions so that we are presenting the value that applies to this specific customer and not losing the customer in a bunch of inane facts that she doesn't care about. The most powerful demonstration of value is the testimonial of a current customer whose problems you have solved. The recipient of your presentation has to know the customer whose testimonial you are using or you have to give background. Showing a previous success is the most powerful way to show your product or service can get the job done!

***Timing the close is everything;*** Know when to close and ask for the order. So many sales are lost because the salesperson doesn't know when to stop talking and ask for the order. Here are some clues: Any question that the customer asks about availability, model choices, etc. is a clear signal, say yes or answer the question while you are pulling out your order pad. A positive statement about the testimonial that you presented is a "buy signal", pull out your order pad! If the buyer asks you to repeat your demo, pull out your order pad and then do it! Any and all buy-signals are your signal to stop talking and pull out the order pad!

***Your feedback and follow-up are your future!*** Doing call reports, keeping records, and following up faithfully help build loyalty. Customer management systems and tools make the job easy. Now you can quickly access all of the information you recorded on previous visits. Now your calendar reminds you of the important dates in your customer's life. Nothing builds loyalty faster than building friendship, and nothing helps more than a program that reminds you of these dates. Remember birthdays and anniversaries, business history dates, and hobbies that your customer enjoys. With your busy lives and hectic schedule, trying to build relationships with more new customers and facing daily pressures, you need to invest in the tools that make you more effective.

Loyalty revolves around trust and relationships! You build loyalty through a process and a set of steps. There are no short-cuts: customer loyalty = success in selling. SSE

*Ken Rogner is senior sales management consultant and sales educator. Call 708-205-6721 or email 3rresources@comcast.net.*

***ACTION: Tweak your LOYALTY process.***

SALES/CLOSING

# Consistent Closing

***Yes, you can boost your sales.***

**by Mark Sneider**

THE KEY TO GETTING GREAT sales meetings is consistency—of methodology used to construct the reach-out, consistency of messaging pushed out to prospects across different media, and consistency of being there early and often, since you never know when a prospect will have a fresh need.

Finding qualified leads and convincing prospects of your value takes time, patience, and persistence.

I find that there is usually a lot of enthusiasm, energy, and excitement leading up to and coming out of a sales meeting. But then salespeople get distracted with managing accounts, putting out fires, dealing with personnel issues. They don't stay with the prospects well enough to close them.

Unless an RFP is in hand or a proposal is a designated next step, closing the sale takes as much effort as opening the door. You have to stay on the radar and show the prospect that you are there to add value to their world.

## Take Five Steps

Following your initial meeting with your prospect, you can improve your chances of winning new business by taking five key steps:

***1. Re-connect ASAP***. Soon after the meeting, follow-up to see how the meeting went and if there are any unanswered questions that can be addressed. We often call into the prospect following the meeting to see if the meeting met the prospect's expectations, and if there was anything left unanswered that we can address.

***2. Be there.*** Find reasons to stay in front of your prospect because if you don't, someone else will. You never know when the prospect will be ready to make the move to start the project, move on some other project, or be ready to make a change. While prospects might be fine today, tomorrow they might wake up and have their boss breathing down their neck, or find their budgets cut and need better efficiencies, or simply tire of the status quo.

***3. Add value.*** Simply being there isn't enough. You need good reason to connect—and I'm talking about insights, ideas, new thinking, fresh perspective. When you find an article about something related to the prospect's world, send it off to him with a link to the article and tell him "I thought you might find this interesting and helpful." Attend a trade show and send him the "top five insights" you glean—and suggest that some ideas might be helpful. Make him aware of competitive activity and offer some perspective on ways to meet this new threat.

***4. Don't give up. Not giving up is the key to winning more business.*** Many salespeople get discouraged when their prospects don't call them back in a few days after the initial meeting. The prospects' world gets busy, and you are not their number-one priority. You need to nudge your way up the priority scale by being there when they make a decision.

***5. Keep yourself fresh.*** When you're talking with prospects following meetings or exchanging emails about some value-add you've pushed their way, use that time to talk about the new things at your company to keep the prospect excited, energized, and motivated to want to work with you.

Closing business isn't a short-term adventure. Opportunities are never ready-made. It takes hard work, creative thinking, and value-added persistence to make prospects take and keep notice of your compelling value.

Put energy in upfront to open doors and get meetings, and put energy into the back-end to win the prize! **SSE**

*Mark Sneider is Managing Director of RSW, U.S. an outsourced lead generation/business development firm. Visit www.rswus.com.*

*ACTION: Close sales more consistently.*

MARKETING/PRODUCTS

# Product Launch

***Take five steps to succeed.***

**by Shannon Kavanaugh**

YOU'VE DONE YOUR HOMEwork and created compelling, accurate, and relevant product positioning for your new product. You've examined the competition and evaluated your place in the market. You know what makes you different or better than the alternative. You've analyzed your profit and margin goals, and created pricing that avoids channel conflict. You understand your potential buyer and their behavior. Good work!

You are now ready for launch—to the right target, with the right message, and the right price. You only get one launch! Follow these five steps to ensure success:

***1. Remember the five Ps:***

- *Product:* Determine your product brand strategy (name, positioning, messaging). Focus on differentiating features! Treat your service like a product. Make it tangible. Give it a name!
- *Packaging:* Consider what your packaging must do (continue to "sell from the shelf" or validate the value of the purchase after the transaction).
- *Place:* Look to new channels and distribution options when you have something new to talk about. But, do not forget to launch to your existing customer base first!
- *Price:* Set an introductory price to entice early adopters to try your new product. Ensure that your customers understand the deal they're getting.
- *Promotion:* Determine the best launch vehicles to use (advertising, direct mail, email, events, PR, telemarketing, other online options); and most compelling offer for your prospects at each stage in the buying cycle (newsletter, white paper, webinar, discount, add-on, trial, demo). Marketing campaigns need variety, frequency, and consistency.

***2. Build a promotional schedule.*** This gives visibility into the up-front work required, shows the activity you can expect during each week of promotion, and validates that your plans are realistic, given resources.

***3. Itemize your budget.*** Include all fees for each program planned. This detail will help you manage closely to your budget, and evaluate trade-offs should your target budget number require further negotiation.

***4. Evaluate your ROI.*** Document the reach, frequency, and projected response rate for each vehicle you've identified to arrive at a potential ROI. Because response rates vary and rely on various factors, provide both conservative and aggressive projections.

***5. Secure management and team buy-off.*** Before executing your plan, present your strategy to your team and get buy-off. A team that believes in the strategy will execute it as planned. **SSE**

*Shannon Kavanaugh is CEO of Go-To-Market Strategies. Visit www.gotomarketstrategies.com.*

*ACTION: Succeed in your next product launch.*

# Sales Compensation Plans

***Drive success with more effective incentives.***

**by Liz Cobb**

THE FOUNDATION OF A SUCcessful strategy is an effective sales incentive plan—one that is clear, motivating, and aligned with goals. This is your most powerful lever for communicating your strategy. Compensation is vital to attracting and retaining the best people and achieving your objectives. Yet I often see plans that are complex and unclear, leaving sales teams confused and unsure of what is expected of them. Incentive compensation plans will undoubtedly drive sales team behavior but *make sure your plans drive it in the way you intend*.

Managers who create sales incentive plans often are not well versed in the best practices for good plan design. They also get bogged down using spreadsheets and word processing tools and lose sight of the big picture, making it even more difficult for the executive leaders to gain visibility into how this complex web of incentives will support business strategy and promote teamwork.

## Take Five Steps

Here are five steps to help you maximize your incentive investment, motivate your sales team, and reach your strategic goals.

***1. Identify the job roles you need to support your go-to-market strategy.*** Review your job roles at least once a year. As your company grows and changes, carve out roles for a subset of tasks. A regular review of each role to examine where employees spend their time and what motivates them will help you identify when you should create a new job role. Two other key factors to consider include where your company stands in its customer-adoption life cycle; and the customer-facing roles that are needed for success. For example, if your company is early in the life cycle, then market share might be the most important consideration. In that case, fostering "hunter"-type sales behavior, which will win new business, is a higher priority than encouraging "farming," which will cultivate existing customers.

The customer-adoption life cycle is divided into four stages with the typical job roles needed to succeed in that stage: Stage 1—Early Adopters: "Hunters;" Stage 2—High Growth: "Specialists;" Stage 3—Penetration: "Account managers;" and Stage 4—Saturation: "Farmers."

Once you determine the lifecycle stage, review your customer-facing roles and include any that have clear and measurable influence over customer behavior, and that you are willing to offer at least 15 percent of on-target earnings (OTE) or target total compensation (TTC), as an incentive. Consider roles from lead generation through customer service wherever you have quantifiable metrics for success. To maximize their motivation, measures or goals should be clear and under control of the person responsible.

***2. Define key elements of the compensation plan for each job role.*** These are the summary-level items important for staff role alignment and benchmarking pay such as the on-target earning (OTE) or target total compensation (TTC), mix, and upside for each job role. *TTC* is the base salary plus incentive compensation at 100 percent of goal. *Mix* is the ratio of salary and incentive relative to your TTC. For example, a 60:40 mix means that your base salary is 60 percent of TTC and your incentive is 40 percent of TTC. In establishing the TTC and mix for a job role, consider these factors: market pay, budget, equity across plans, scope of job, type of sale, and required experience. *Upside* is the extra earning potential for those who exceed quota. Nothing is more motivating than getting to the next tier of commission rates.

Use a relevant mix and upside for each job role. Consider that the greater the influence persuading the customer, the higher the variable incentive component should be. Generally speaking, the "hunters" on your team who are pursuing new markets with new products should be highly leveraged with 50 to 70 percent of their TTC consisting of incentive pay, and upside potential for incentive being twice as much as it would be at 100 percent. Those who sell existing products to existing customers should have less leverage and upside potential.

Next, clearly define performance measures and goals. Your plans should have two or three tangible measures, such as bookings, orders, or new customers. Design the plans to encourage teamwork. Define specific crediting terms, measures, and payout timing.

***3. Model your costs—know your cost exposure.*** Nothing is worse than signing a huge commission check as a result of a poorly designed plan. Sure you are happy to reward a star who has earned it, but it is painful to spend it because of a loophole. To expose these costs, you need to model incentive costs at varying levels of attainment. Accurate cost modeling enables you to check for full allocation of quotas and see your incentive cost of sales in advance. In a complex selling model, you need to look at the overall costs for all job roles, including overlay or support roles. Modeling costs enables you to compare different trends in your sales cycle.

***4. Produce your plan documents.*** Since these documents drive strategy, they must be clear and motivating. The value of a great plan can get lost in a poor document. Terms and conditions should be well-defined and aim for consistency of policies and definitions across roles. Your plans are contracts and should be circulated among key stakeholders and your legal department and be clear and simple so that sales reps know their goals and priorities.

***5. Implement the pay system.*** Once you communicate the plans, follow through with payment and reporting. There should be no confusion on the amount to be paid and the time that a sales rep receives the payment. Late or inaccurate payments are demotivating.

Give the reward soon after the achievement to reinforce the connection between the behavior and the incentive. Also provide frequent feedback so that your team can modify behavior to achieve the goals.

Use these tips to create a strong sales incentive plan that drives your strategy and motivates your team. SSE

*Liz Cobb is CEO and founder of Makana Solutions, a company focused on sales compensation solutions. Visit www.makanasolutions.com.*

*ACTION: Drive strategy with sales compensation.*

PERFORMANCE/PASSION

# Passionate Performance

***Incremental changes, exponential results.***

**by Jay Forte**

THE MORE CLOSELY PEOPLE are connected to their roles (they like what they do) and to their managers (strong relationships) the better they perform. These connections are the power behind passionate performance.

Today, service is king; service events are passionate or connective events.

The more passionate a customer is about a brand, product or company, the more he buys. The more passionate a person is about his work and his manager, the better he performs. Feeling connected is the key to igniting passion; by looking at connections you see how to make the right changes to drive performance and results.

Today, managers must inspire and engage to create powerful connections with their employees. Performance is based on these connections.

Many management methods need to change to ignite passionate performance and connections. No workplace likes massive change, even if the change is for the better.

Implementing incremental changes can yield exponential results. Consider these five incremental changes:

***1. Spend time with each employee.*** This builds personal connections. People quit people before they quit companies. When personal connections don't exist between managers and employees, people are less loyal and committed and perform less. Take an employee to lunch. Spend five minutes before the day starts or after the day ends just catching up. Ask questions that indicate your employees' values, interests and talents. The more you know about them, the stronger you can make your connection to their roles.

***2. Match the employees' talents to their role.*** The closer the employee's natural thinking (talents) matches the thinking required in his role, the more capable he feels and the greater his contribution, effort, and performance. To assess employee talents, access a questionnaire like Strengthsfinder 2.0 by Tom Rath, and have each employee complete the questions. This helps introduce the language of "talents" and helps all employees learn and articulate what they are intrinsically good at. The more an employee uses these talents in his role, the more passionate he becomes about performance. If an employee is not suited to or dislikes his role, his performance will suffer. Realign employees to roles that are a better fit for their talents.

***3. Give employees a problem or project to handle.*** Show that you trust people by giving them a problem or project to manage, solve, or complete. This encourages ownership, engagement and passionate performance, so long as the project or problem is in the employee's talent area. Besides getting the problem or project off your desk, it activates employees to step up and contribute. In their talent areas, employees are capable of more performance than they currently offer.

***4. Talk about the future.*** How willing are you to perform in a great way if you do not know where your job or career is going? Would you commit to a company or manager if you never talk about your future? Actively involve employees in discussions about their futures. Career conversations keep employees connected.

***5. Commit to having fun.*** People want to have fun at work. They want to be part of high-energy and dynamic environments that celebrate, build rapport, and connect. Host lunches, theme days, fun programs, community events and other things to keep employees interested, excited, and performing.

To be passionate performers, people need connections—mind and heart. SSE

*Jay Forte is a speaker, consultant, founder of Humanetrics, and author of* Fire Up Your Employees and Smoke Your Competition. *Call: 401-338-3505 or visit: www.humanetricsllc.com.*

*ACTION: Make meaningful connections.*

SALES/PARASITES

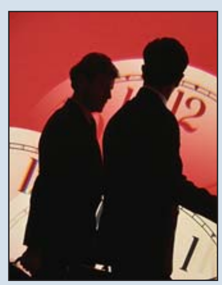
# Sales Parasites

*Get rid of them.*

**by Landy Chase**

SALES PROFESSIONALS PASS through three stages—Larvae, Termite, and Parasite—and in each stage they assume a different persona.

***Sales Larvae*** are neophytes. Larvae are soft, sightless, and legless individuals who, due to lack of knowledge and experience, fumble around blindly within the cocoon of their sales territory. They haven't yet mutated into full-fledged salespeople.



***Sales Termites*** have the tools and skills to work their way through tough sales barriers. Termites drive the growth of the business, and they are relatively easy for the competent sales executive to manage.

***Sales Parasites*** stop calling on new accounts and start living off of current customers. Incapable of foraging for food, they draw blood and nourishment in the form of a paycheck from the host employer. If they have tenure, peer respect, experience or knowledge, you tend to cut them some slack and let them feed off of the company. However, tolerating this situation and having a different set of rules for Parasites sends a poor message: "We have two sets of standards—one for our Parasites, and one for everyone else; we don't hold people accountable for results; becoming a Parasite is a reward for seniority; if you stay around, you can be a Parasite."

You must hold your salespeople accountable for new business results.

## Four Suggestions

Here are four suggestions:

***Introduce a two-tiered commission plan*** that pays a higher premium on new business and a reduced commission on work from existing customers. This puts the focus on finding new business. Parasites may protest or threaten to leave the company, but stick to your guns.

***Tie rewards and recognition to developing new accounts.*** Lavish praise and reward on those who focus on new business. Also, tie the compensation plan to the profitability of the business your reps sell.

***Introduce accountability goals for new account growth.*** Give financial incentives for meeting new-business goals. Introduce negative consequences for failure to meet minimum objectives. Parasites won't release their grip on their host unless pain is applied to the source of the food supply.

***Don't allow your Parasites to hold you hostage.*** Rarely does a company suffer a big decrease in business by the departure of Parasites. If they simply maintain their customer base, your business will deteriorate. SSE

*Landy Chase speaks on advanced selling and sales management topics. Visit www.landychase.com or call (800) 370-8026.*

*ACTION: Get rid of your sales parasites.*

# Effective Presentation

***Six keys to making an impression.***

by Dale L. Klamfoth

LEE IACOCCA SAID: "YOU can have brilliant ideas; but if you can't get them across, your ideas won't get you anywhere." I offer some tips to help you get your ideas across. They will serve you well in any situation, whether you meet with your team, make a proposal to management, or speak at an industry conference.

***1. Identify your goal.*** What are you seeking to do? Present information to the audience? Persuade them to your point of view? Motivate them to take action? Have a clear goal in mind. To get a firm fix on what that is, complete this sentence: "When the meeting is over I want the audience to . . . ."

***2. Analyze the audience.*** Learn everything you can about who will be there. Determine their role and function. Try to identify their understanding of your topic. Knowing this will prevent you from talking down to them or over their heads. Learn their interest in your topic. Don't assume you have an attentive audience. If the audience is required to attend, you'll have to be very engaging. Learn how they will be affected by the plan or recommendation you present, particularly whether they will like it or not. This information will help you describe the payoffs your plan provides the audience members or help you defuse their disappointment.

***3. Structure the message.*** Capture everyone's attention right at the beginning. You can do this by telling a personal anecdote. Everyone loves a story. You can ask a question, either real or rhetorical. You can present a dramatic statistic. You can make a contrarian statement. All these approaches offer excellent potential. Humor can be risky. Unless you're very good at it, best leave it to the professional comedians.

***Keep it short.*** Audiences today have shorter attention spans than in the past. Generally, a presentation should not be longer than 20 minutes plus time for the Q&A. So, limit the number of points you want to get across. List those points and build on them. As you build, anticipate the questions you will likely be asked and incorporate their answers into your content. If you plan to cite metrics, be certain the audience respects the source. Do not use jargon, Dilbert-speak, or buzzwords. They are all instant turnoffs. Avoid unnecessary details; you can go into them if asked during the Q&A or later.

***Plan the ending.*** If you are conveying information, state your key points succinctly. If you are presenting a point of view, summarize the reasons why it is sound—from that audience's perspective. If you want the audience to take action, touch on all the reasons why they will get a payoff from it and tell them what to do next.

***4. Choose your visuals.*** Visuals are appropriate in some situations, such as when you are presenting complex material. They may not be needed if your message is intended to inspire and motivate. In those cases, the audience's full attention should be on you. Whatever your choice of visuals, don't let them upstage you.

Do not darken the room. This will keep the audience from seeing you show your passion for your message. What is more you cannot see the audience in the dark and will not be able to adjust your delivery as needed.

Don't overuse PowerPoint. Keep the graphics simple. Do not overload the slides. For each slide, use a maximum of four lines of four words each. Do not use the visuals as cue cards. Speak to the audience, not the visuals.

A simple flipchart often works best. Stand to the right, turn each page with your left hand, and turn your attention back to the audience. Give the audience time to see what's on the page, then continue talking, pointing to each item with an open left hand as you discuss it.

***5. Rehearse with realism.*** Do not count on the power of your position to get the audience's cooperation. You must persuade the audience to accept your viewpoint; and, to move them to action, you must inspire them.

If you want to inspire a group, you must come across as credible, confident and likable, someone who shares the audience's values and feels their pain. Put passion into your message. Show that you care deeply. Create some energy! The audience will share your enthusiasm.

You can't express passion if you speak from a script. Practice to the point you can speak spontaneously. This takes serious rehearsing. Use your visuals, rehearse with co-workers who play the role of audience and give you feedback on how well you come across.

Rehearse your body movement as well as content. Get out from behind the lectern since it's a barrier between you and the audience. Let your whole body enliven your presentation; the larger the room, the greater the body movement is needed. Gesture decisively but naturally to make a point. When you are not gesturing, drop your hands at your side comfortably. Do not use the "fig leaf" or "parade rest" posture; rather, relax your open palms at your side. Take a breath after each thought to prevent yourself from speaking too quickly. Vary your voice level, use dramatic pauses, and use your eyes effectively. Do not look down at the floor or at the back wall or scan the room. Instead, look at one audience member as you say a phrase, breathe, and then look at another. This helps you connect with the audience and reduces any anxiety. Breathing naturally also helps reduce nervousness.

Looking at individual faces will help you gauge how the audience is reacting. Are they looking interested? Expand on that point. Do they seem puzzled? Simplify what you're saying or use a familiar analogy. Are they looking bored? Shake things up by asking a question.

Rehearsal pays huge dividends. The more often you present, the shorter the rehearsal time that is needed.

***6. Prepare for the Q&A.*** With a small group, invite questions as you present, particularly if it is a planning meeting. With a larger audience, answer questions at the end. Rehearse the Q&A as well. Identify questions likely to be asked. Practice delivering succinct, compelling answers that tie back to your main points. Use the last question as a way to wrap up what you've said, express your passion for your idea, and ask people to take action. **SSE**

*Dale L. Klamfoth is VP of Communispond, providing coaching and training in sales, presentations and communications skills. Visit www.communispond.com.*

***ACTION: Make a favorable impression.***

PERFORMANCE/TEAMWORK

# Why All-Star Teams Fail

***Strategies to get everyone to play nice.***

**by Gregg Gregory**

IN THEORY, ANY ALL-STAR team—whether in sports or in business—should be ultra successful. But like the 2006 U.S. basketball team or Enron, why do many fail?

***1. The organization has not built a culture of trust and respect.*** All-Star teams are built from stellar performers, usually with enormous egos, which may translate into a lack of trust. They may not easily trust others, or be trusted themselves. Without trust and respect, the team lacks a solid foundation. Building trust is easy, but not necessarily simple. The most effective ways to build trust are: say what you mean and mean what you say; always speak and act with integrity; be consistent between word and deed; and stay out of the gossip and rumor mills.

Once trust and respect are developed, teams are able to focus on the overall mission without worrying about a back-stabbing teammate. If trust is breached it becomes more difficult to rebuild the next time.

***2. Failing to create the chemistry necessary to succeed.*** Whether in sports or business, an All-Star team must have the right players in the right positions. If not, a team may pursue a common goal, but when the players are not complementing each other's skills and mindsets, disaster will strike the core of the team.

How is the chemistry of your team? The more you know about team members professionally and personally allows the team to gel much more quickly and effectively. The best players aren't always the right ones. Team chemistry allows for trust and respect while all members continue to focus on accomplishing their individual and team productivity goals.

***3. Lack of mutual accountability.*** Employees should hold themselves accountable. Some of the best teams are those whose leaders are only a resource in the event of a problem. Some organizations have accomplished this result by having customers and other departments complete a satisfaction survey that involves not just one person, but the entire team. Everything from bonuses, performance evaluations, and increased pay should depend on the team's survey result. Everyone is held accountable, resulting in a win-win.

***4. Poor team language.*** Ineffective internal communication in a team setting will result in disaster. The first sign of an internal breakdown is "me" centered language. Often this occurs in the subconscious mind and is never noticed. In the workplace the language typically sounds like, "I think it should have been done this way" or maybe, "I just don't get it." One of the biggest offenders is the phrase "It's not my job." These statements revolve around one person rather than the team.

As a team begins to trust and respect each other, the process moves more smoothly. A successful leader focuses on the communication of "we" and not individual success or failure. Once the mind begins to process the difference in internal language, the external language follows suit.

When a team performs at peak levels, everyone knows they are an integral part of something successful. Success allows the team—as well as customers, vendors, and the whole organization—to experience more focus, cooperation, productivity, and impact.

If we understand another person's behaviors, and adapt ours to a more team-centered approach, we can become better producers. That is the little secret of playing nice in the sandbox. **SSE**

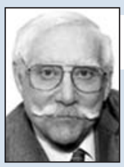
*Gregg Gregory is a consultant, speaker, and founder of Gregg Gregory, LLC. Call 866-764-TEAM or visit www.GreggSpeaks.com.*

***ACTION: Build a successful All-Star team.***

SERVICE/INVESTMENT

# Invest in Service

***It pays many big dividends.***



**by Jim Dillahunty**

THE CONCEPT OF CUSTOMER service is shifting, as more leaders recognize that customer service (CS) represents an investment account that can yield large dividends during market turmoil. Wise leaders deposit into their CS programs the value of their training, procedures, systems, and the pride of their employees. With consistent and diligent contributions, the value of the CS account will grow and produce measurable results in sales, repeat sales, customer loyalty, brand value, market share, and market cap.

Traditionally, CS is viewed as an expense, approved in good times and cut in bad. Yet in the times of stress, CS programs yield dividends in the form of repeat sales, brand equity, and fierce customer loyalty.

Organizations with fiercely loyal customers invest time and resources in developing systemic programs of CS. In gaining and retaining customers, CS still has a vital role to play. You can determine the economic value of a customer.

The ability to recognize the value of CS is partly based on your belief about the nature of the business. In your next meeting, ask yourself and your team: "What is the purpose of our business?" If their answers are laced with phrases like "to make money", "to sell product", and "to be number one", your managers are missing an important point. Yes, you need revenues, profits, and sales to prosper, but these shouldn't come at the expense of service.

You must have a higher calling than just making money. Great organizations define their purpose in terms like "to bring a rewarding and delightful experience to our customers and shareholders". If your customers receive a rewarding experience when they use your product or service, you'll have sales, profits, revenues, loyal customers, and delighted stakeholders. When consumers trim their expenses, your firm's products or services will be the last to be cut, and your market share will increase.

CS principles should permeate your organization: product or service design, manufacturing, quality control, packaging, distribution, advertising, PR, point-of-sale, and post-sales support. Any flaws in your CS will diminish the satisfaction and delight of customers. A customer experience of less than delight diminishes brand loyalty.

The service experienced by your customers is affected by your after-sales support system and by product or service design. Review how you interface with your customers and suppliers. Ask them about their experiences when they use your products, web site, or order-entry procedures to critique the ease of use. The value of the well-designed interfaces for customers, suppliers and stakeholders shapes their perception of your brand value. **SSE**

*Jim Dillahunty is a speaker and consultant in customer service. Visit www.NewParadigms.com.*

***ACTION: Invest in customer service.***

# Service Matters Most

*Especially in challenging times.*

**by Ron Kaufman**

As the wind of economic cycles blow hard, some managers try to contain costs by cutting corners on customer service. This is the *wrong* thing to do.

Service matters now more than ever for four reasons: 1. When people buy during an economic downturn, they are conscious of the hard-earned money that they spend. Customers want *more attention*, more appreciation, and more recognition when making their purchases with you, not less. 2. Customers want to get maximum value for the money they spend. They want assistance, education, training, installation, modifications, and support. The basic product may remain the same, but they want *more* service. 3. Customers want firmer guarantees that their purchase was the right thing to do. In tough times, every expenditure is scrutinized. *Provide the assurance* your customers seek with generous service guarantees, regular follow-up and speedy follow-through on all queries and complaints. 4. In tough times, people talk more with each other about saving money and getting good value. *Positive word-of-mouth* is a powerful force at any time. In difficult times, even more ears will be listening. Be sure the words spoken about your business are good ones!

## Eight Secrets of Superior Service

Giving good service in tough times makes good business sense. But how do you actually achieve it? Here are eight proven principles you can use.

***1. Know how your customers' expectations are rising and changing over time.*** What was good enough last year may not be good enough now. Use customer surveys, interviews and focus groups to understand what your customers really want, what they value and what they believe they are getting (or not getting) from your business.

***2. Use quality service to differentiate your business from your competition.*** Your products may be reliable and up-to-date, but your competitors' goods are, too. Your delivery systems may be fast and user-friendly, but so are your competitors'! You can make a more lasting difference by providing personalized, responsive and extra-mile service that stands out in a way your customers will appreciate and remember.

***3. Set and achieve high service standards.*** You can go beyond basic and expected levels of service to provide your customers with desired and even surprising service interactions. Determine the standard for service in your industry, and then find a way to go beyond it. Give more choice than 'the usual', be more flexible than 'normal', be faster than 'the average', and extend a better warranty than all the others. Your customers will notice your higher standards. But eventually

those standards will be copied by your competitors, too. So don't slow down. Keep stepping UP!

***4. Learn to manage your customers' expectations.*** You need to bring customer expectations into line with what you know you can deliver. Build a reputation for making and keeping clear promises. Once you establish trust and good reputation, you only need to ask customers for their patience when you can't meet their first requests. Usually they'll extend you leeway. Another way to manage customers' expectations is to under-promise, then over-deliver. For example: you know your customer wants something done *fast*. You know it will take an hour to complete. Don't tell your customer it will take an hour. Instead, let them know you will *rush* on their behalf, but promise a 90-minute timeframe. Then, when you finish in just one hour, your customer will be delighted to find that you finished the job 'so quickly'. That's 'under promise, then over deliver'.

***5. Bounce back with effective service recovery.*** Sometimes things *do* go wrong. When it happens to your customers, do everything you can to set things right. Fix the problem and show sincere concern for any discomfort, frustration, or inconvenience. Then *do a little more* by giving your customer something positive to remember—a token of goodwill, a gift of appreciation, a discount on future orders, an upgrade to a higher class of product.

***6. Appreciate your complaining customers.*** Customers with complaints can help you improve your business. They point out where your system is faulty or your procedures are weak and problematic. They show where your products or services are below expectations. They point out areas where your competitors are getting ahead or where your staff is falling behind. These are the same insights and conclusions companies pay consultants to provide. But a complainer gives them to you free!

***7. Take personal responsibility.*** In many organizations, people are quick to blame others for problems or difficulties at work: managers blame staff, staff blame managers, Engineering blames Sales, Sales blames Marketing and everyone blames Finance. This does not help. In fact, all the finger-pointing make things much worse. The most reliable way to bring about constructive change in your organization is to take personal responsibility and help make good things happen. When you see something that needs to be done, do it. If you see something that needs to be done in another department, recommend it. Be the person who makes suggestions, proposes new ideas and volunteers to help on problem solving teams, projects, and solutions.

***8. See the world from each customer's point of view.*** We often get so caught up in our own world that we lose sight of what our customers actually experience. Make time to stand on the other side of the counter or listen on the other end of the phone. Be a 'mystery shopper' at your own place of business. Or become a customer of your best competition. What you notice when you look from the 'other side' is what your customers experience every day.

*Service* is the currency that keeps our economy moving: "I serve you in one business, you serve me in another." When either of us improves, the economy gets a little better.

Use these eight principles to build a superior service culture. SSE

*Ron Kaufman is a motivator, trainer, consultant, and author of* UP Your Service! *and the inspirational book series* Lift Me Up! *Visit www.UpYourService.com.*

*ACTION: Create a service culture.*

SALES/KEYS

# Make the Sale

***Focus on what you control.***

**by Julie Thomas**

I ONCE SPOKE WITH A SALES executive who was frustrated and concerned about everything going on in the economy. "Credit crisis, stock market crash, banking fiascos, housing meltdown," she said. "Who will buy from me now?"

You can make the sale, even in an uncertain economy. Companies are still in business, and work is still getting done. So, what can you do today to position yourself for success?

Here are a few keys to making and exceeding quota in a down economy.

***Focus on the positive.*** Right now, it is easy to be overwhelmed by negative messages and bad news. To succeed during this time, attitude is important. Tune out all information that is not helpful to you. Turn off the 24-hour news cycle and updates from the pundits. As a sales manager or sales rep, much is going that is outside of your control. Focus on those things you can control. Successful people find opportunity and positive news even in difficult times. Keep a positive attitude.

***Focus on your customer with empathy.*** Know how to solve customer problems. The problems facing your customers and prospects won't go away; in fact, now, they may even be magnified. However, things may be changing for your customers that will impact your sales cycles. In difficult times, people become more risk-averse. This risk aversion may manifest in many ways, including taking longer to make decisions and involving more people in those decisions. You need to focus on risk mitigation for your clients.

***Focus on real value.*** Now, real value must be understood by your customers and prospects. Soft-dollar ROI may not be enough to justify the decision to purchase. In difficult times, clients expect the time-to-value to be short. In good times it may be okay to realize ROI in 18 to 24 months. Now, the ROI expectation may be six months in order for the project to get funded. Clients are focused on real monetary gains as a result of their investments. Are you positioned to save them money or grow revenue?

***Focus on preparation.*** The top 20 percent of sales executives won't be affected by this economy. They'll outprepare and outsell their competition. Sales executives can't just show up for a sales call and hope that they stumble across an opportunity. They need to be purposeful, customer-focused, and ready to execute. Spend time understanding your clients, their industries and markets, and building creative solutions with them.

***Focus on activities.*** Increase your activity by 35 percent! Don't reduce activity and cling to your pipeline. You'll need to make more sales calls, engage prospects (potential buyers), and qualify them to meet your goals. Leverage existing relationships and referrals at every opportunity.

***Focus on qualification.*** Make the most of your customer-centric sales processes to leverage best practices and repeatable strategies. Just because someone can buy, doesn't mean they will. Your prospect qualification process is reverse-engineered from how your prospects make decisions: Should I buy this? Can I buy this? Is it worth it? Am I convinced?

Answer these questions with your prospects before you invest time and resources in a sales cycle. If prospects are not qualified—let them go and find people who can be qualified.

Remember, your competitors are facing the same difficulties that you are. Stay calm, stay focused, and look for their vulnerabilities. You should be playing both defense and offense with your customers to defend your position. By focusing on the customer, you won't be outsold—and you can win the customer's business and loyalty. SSE

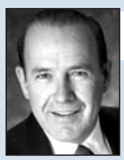
*Julie Thomas is President and CEO of ValueSelling Associates. Visit www.valueselling.com.*

*ACTION: Focus on these keys for more sales.*

SERVICE/RECOVERY

# Service Recovery

***Keep the customers you have.***



**by John Tschohl**

IF YOU WANT TO INCREASE sales, grow a loyal customer base that is the envy of your competitors, and provide service that is worth thousands of dollars in advertising and marketing, you must solve your customer's problems—and do so quickly.

Every company, no matter how excellent its products or employees, makes mistakes. How they respond is what separates customer-service driven organizations from the rest of the pack. Service recovery is the key.

Service recovery is solving a customer's problem and making that customer feel as if he's just done business with the greatest company on earth. Sadly, most companies handcuff their employees with inflexible policies and procedures that discourage them from solving a customer's problem.

Empowerment is the backbone of service recovery. Employees must be allowed to solve a customer's problem on the spot. Customers who experience a problem and have that problem solved are more loyal.

Nothing is as powerful—or inexpensive—as word-of-mouth advertising. Happy customers will tell everyone they know about how well you treated them. You must care for them, nurture them, and earn their undying loyalty.

To provide service recovery that will grow business, take four steps:

***1. Take responsibility.*** Admit that the company made a mistake, tell the customer you're sorry for the problem, and then take steps to solve it.

***2. Act quickly.*** Service recovery should happen in 60 seconds or less. Great service recovery is not moved up the ladder or passed to a supervisor to be handled later. The cost of a delay is dramatic; most customers won't wait—they will leave you. The longer it takes for a complaint to be resolved, the angrier they'll get and take business—and money—elsewhere.

***3. Be empowered.*** Without empowered employees, you'll never have service recovery. And, if you don't have service recovery, you won't have loyal customers. The magic of service recovery occurs on the frontline. Identify and eliminate policies and procedures that tie your employees' hands and reward those who make empowered decisions that satisfy—and retain—your customers.

***4. Compensate.*** Service recovery doesn't end when you solve a customer's problem. You must give them something of value that lets them know you value their business.

By taking these steps, you prevent customer defections, create word-of-mouth advertising, and dramatically increase your sales and profits. SSE

*John Tschohl is president of the Service Quality Institute. Email quality@servicequality.com or visit www.customer-service.com.*

*ACTION: Keep the customers you now have.*

# Rev up Revenue

*Even in an ailing economy.*


by Seleste Lunsford and Craig Perrin

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO INCREASE SALES productivity in times like this?

Housing is so bad that your mortgage is upside down. Credit is so tight that you can't borrow a garden hoe. The dollar is so weak that a pint in London sets you back a day's pay.

For reasons of their own, customers and prospects are sitting on their cash. What's the impact on you of this excruciating state of suspended compensation?

- Sales cycles get longer.
- Client conversations move smoothly from price, to price, to price.
- Even friendly clients won't give you an Altoid.
- Tirekickers invade in numbers.

You say you've done everything obvious and nothing works? Maybe it's time to narrow your focus.

## Up the Ladder

In a booming economy, average salespeople can thrive at one rung above an order-taker. With few orders to take, you need to cultivate sales in a logical way.

First, create a clear line of sight. Help salespeople see how your sales strategy should guide their efforts—who to sell to, what value proposition to sell, and what sales process to follow. Until you communicate with such clarity, each salesperson will likely take a different tack, which rarely brings the predictable revenue you need.

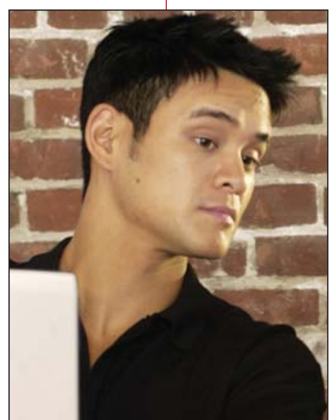
Earning customer loyalty and face time takes discipline and the right mindset: customer first, not product first. Cash-strapped prospects won't make time for a product-obsessed seller. They will value their relationship with a trusted business advisor.

Especially in today's market, a clear strategy and customer-relationship process support wise investments, adaptability, and predictable results.

## Damn the Torpedoes!

Since all markets undergo cyclical change, there are many tales about forging ahead when money is tight.

- Before World War II, department-store giants Montgomery Ward and Sears battled for market share. Expecting a recession, Wards turned cautious. Sears expanded. When the market boomed and Wards decided to spend, it was too late. Locked out of lucrative locations, the company never recovered.
- Bain & Co. studied 700 firms in the recession of 1991-92: 20 percent entered behind their competitors yet emerged in front, while 20 percent went in a leader and came out a laggard—twice the shift you'd expect in a stable economy. According to Bain, bold players like Wal-Mart expanded their offerings. Timid players like Kmart struggle to this day.
- McKinsey & Co. studied 1,300 firms in the downturn of 2001-03: 40 percent fell from the top, while 15 percent rose to the top. Citing "strategic flexibility," McKinsey noted that the winners foresaw and readied themselves for new opportunities.



***The lesson here?*** At every point in the economic cycle, successful sales organizations prepare for the opportunities that inevitably come.

## Which Way Is North?

So much for history. What can you do now to get sales productivity back on track? Here are four suggestions:

***1. Equip people with selling and negotiating skills.*** Skillful salespeople win. Properly supported, they:

- Exude confidence and inspire confidence in clients.
- Fathom deeper client needs.
- Drive purchase behavior by positioning what they sell as revenue-generating strategic necessities.
- Negotiate mutually-beneficial terms.

As a result, these salespeople close far more business. What's more, your investment in selling skills reduces costs through shorter sales cycles, generates immediate revenue, and positions you for long-term success.

***2. Get to know existing accounts.*** In tough times, savvy salespeople expand contacts in their accounts—to grow immediate sales and to hold the accounts when contacts move on. These salespeople do what it takes to understand the roles that contacts play in purchase decisions, and the business realities that shape buying decisions.

Instead of cutting back on sales calls to reduce costs, encourage more client dialogue and expand your contacts.

***3. Plan for the best.*** Account planning can rev up sales—if it helps salespeople identify buyers and assess their buying potential. Planning helps salespeople to:

- Foresee and overcome objections.
- Build long-term presence in accounts.
- Zero in on the right prospects—those with potential to buy.
- Engage prospects by tailoring an approach to their key business issues.
- Ask right questions at right times to shape productive dialogue.

***4. Create the conditions that motivate selling.*** Any impact from motivational speeches and awards is usually short-lived. In a listless economy, salespeople need leaders who continuously foster the self-motivation required to handle more rejection and longer sales cycles. To create an environment that supports productive self-motivation:

- Regularly assess performance and recommend specific behavior changes.
- Provide the stimulation, focus, and information salespeople need to succeed.
- Devise creative incentive programs.
- Make yourself available for advice.
- Go out of your way to reinforce key methods and model desired behaviors.

This kind of leadership keeps people active and positive, yielding real payoffs as self-motivated salespeople engage clients and prospects.

Even in a down market, you can rev up revenue. What's the summary wisdom of successful sales organizations?

- Secure short-term business by staying close to customers.
- Respond quickly to changing customer needs and concerns.
- Take strategic steps to position yourself for long-term success.
- Avoid the temptation to wait and see.

Successful sales organizations weather tough times with thoughtful initiatives, skilled salespeople, and healthy client relationships. SSE

*Seleste Lunsford is a Consultant for AchieveGlobal and co-author of* Secrets of Top-Performing Salespeople *and* Strategies that Win Sales*. Craig Perrin is Director of Solution Development for AchieveGlobal and coauthor of* Leading Teams*. Visit www.achieveglobal.com.*

*ACTION: Rev up your sales revenue.*

MARKETING/MISTAKES

# Five Fatal Mistakes

*They often spell disaster.*

**by John Haskell**

MANY COMPANIES FACE A shrinking market, and competition is cutting prices in spite of higher costs. Salespeople are losing business. What options do you have to improve the business?

Ask yourself two questions: First, what are you currently doing? Second, what have you not done in the past?

Five mistakes tend to stand out. You can eliminate these mistakes, if you have the discipline and desire.

***1. No marketing plan.*** The marketing plan enables you to know how you can achieve the goals. You can write a plan, using a five-part format: 1) *Goals*: Your goals need to be hard-edged; avoid soft sales targets, undefined goals, weak market data, ineffective advertising, and vague promotion schedules. 2) *Problems*: Identify the major problems that stand in the way of reaching goals. 3) *Opportunities*: Spell out opportunities that offset the problems. 4) *Strategy*: Define a longer-term strategy—this is the "What?" statement. What do we want to be five years down the road? 5) *Tactics*: Define your tactics specifically. This section, accompanied by a marketing calendar and budget, provides the road map for execution, which leads to sales success. This template makes it easy; simply fill in the blanks. Sort opportunities in order of priority.

***2. A weak understanding of the marketing environment (you lack a competitive matrix).*** Every company has a position in the market based on specific attributes (taste, price, size, location). Narrowing them down, analyzing the vital differences, and planning how to respond to the competitive environment is the prescription for success.

***3. No understanding of your customer's real buying motivation.*** If you can't afford extensive marketing research, use simple questionnaires or low-cost focus groups to get the vital data that enables you to build marketing, merchandising, advertising, and sales promotion tactics that work. Do the research, listen carefully, and act decisively for the long term.

***4. No sales forecasts.*** Planning for the business begins with a sales forecast. If management does not look forward, they will get constant surprises. Building a forecast involves an analysis of the customer's business, their relationship with your company, and their marketing plan for the next year.

The forecaster should be the salesperson who is closest to that customer. Each salesperson must forecast for his or her major customers. The forecast must be in by a specific date, and the salesperson must be prepared to discuss the rationale behind the forecast.

The difference between the sales team's forecast and the management's goal for the year is the "planning gap." Filling that gap is what marketing and management address. The team's job is to eliminate excuses by salespeople.

***5. No sales system.*** Effective selling is the result of a complete system. Effective salespeople are "self-managed professionals" who know that phone calls must be organized beforehand, records must be kept, and selling is a discipline.

Effective selling is based on using the company's marketing program to create a working marketing and sales plan for each key customer. Each salesperson has a game plan for every 30-day period. He or she works the plan every day. Every phone call and visit is designed to achieve the plan. The mantra is: "*I know my customer, our products, and our marketing plan. My job is to bring these three elements together into a plan for each of my best customers. I sell products that will not come back to customers who will.*"

Eliminating mistakes enables you to solidify a position and move forward. SSE

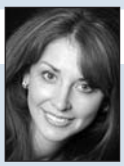
*John Haskell, aka Dr. Revenue, is president of The Professional Marketing Group and author of* Profit Rx. *Visit www.drrevenue.com.*

***ACTION: Avoid making these five mistakes.***

MARKETING/CONNECTION

# What Women Want

*Make meaningful connections.*



**by Kristi Faulkner**

MAKING A MEANINGFUL connection to your consumer is imperative to selling your product. Knowing what motivates your buyer is Step 1. You must know who he is. Or *she*, more likely.

*Women are the biggest missed opportunity in marketing*. Women influence 85 percent of all purchases. Women account for $7 trillion of purchases; men account for less than $2 trillion. No matter what product or service you offer, your consumer is a woman.

Even though women are holders of the purse strings, they often feel ignored or misunderstood. They are not exasperated or angry by tired marketing messages—they're indifferent.

*Marketing to women is a matter of insights, not stereotypes*. Having a better way to speak to women begins with having women speaking to women in their language. *Women know if an ad was created by a man or by a woman. They know when you're talking to them, and when you're talking past them.*

What does this mean for your brand? You need to pay more attention to women and find ways to capture their attention, pique their interest, close the sale, and win customers for life by *connecting women to companies, to brands, and to one another*. Women are more loyal consumers.

Add respect and a healthy dose of reality into marketing communications aimed at women. Want women to like you? We offer these five tips:

***Skip the sexual stereotypes.*** Talk to us like the wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, and girlfriends, that we are. Rarely do we think of ourselves as stiletto wearing, man-pleasing, floor scrubbing Stepford wives, so neither should you.

***Make your value proposition empathetic.*** In your messaging, tell us: "We know your dollar needs to be spent wiser than ever; you can feel confident that the money you spend on our product will be worth it."

***Respect that we're multidimensional***—show images we relate to, situations that might happen in our day, exchanges we might have, problems we might face. Then show us how your product can make us more efficient and productive in managing our busy families and lives.

***Be subliminal.*** We are thinkers and feelers; we appreciate subtle nuances in messaging, and we pick up on changes in voice tone. No need for strong words, loud music, over-the-top images. We'll get your message if the tone is right.

Be sure that you want us buying your product. We want to feel wanted, but we can tell when you're insincere.

With women deciding where most dollars are spent, advertising and marketing must make sense to them. By speaking to women with respect, you have a better chance of women connecting to your brand and buying it. SSE

*Kristi Faulkner is creative director of Womenkind. Visit www.womenkind.net or email Kristi@womenkind.net.*

***ACTION: Make connections with women.***

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