

Breaking New Ground ... Winning New Business

Why is winning new business so hard in today's economy?

You work hard to keep your existing business by providing the best possible customer service. You don't want to lose existing customers. The problem is that your competitors have the same strategy. So, you need something to differentiate you from the competition. On that note, you believe that your marketing efforts establish your key differentiation and you're ready to go. But then why are your sales people still having such a tough time winning new business? To answer that vital question, let's take a look at what is happening out there.

One issue is that many sales people like to stay in their comfort zone; as a result, they prefer calling on the people that they know. For every good "hunter" out there, there must be 10 good "farmers." Do you have the right person for the job? Good "hunters" are driven, competitive, persistent and confident. They have high energy, good communication skills and the ability to "own" their situation. The former NFL quarterback and current analyst Ron Jaworski says that "amnesia" helps Eli Manning perform as an elite quarterback. Good "hunters" need amnesia too. They need to be able to forget and move on. There's no room for bruised egos in prospecting. Having the right person in the job is the first and most important step in forming an effective sales organization.

Let's assume that you have the right person for the job. What is keeping them from getting new business? In my discussions with sales people, they say that the biggest challenge is getting the first appointment. Times have changed and access is more difficult today. Prospects are on the move, they don't sit at their desk. Between Caller ID, voice mail and spam filters, prospects are protected from email marketing campaigns, "evil" telemarketers and dialing-for-dollars sales people. Let's take a look at two ways to break the logjam to get that first conversation.

The easiest way to get a conversation is from a referral. Referrals can come from satisfied customers, former colleagues, friends or other networking associates. LinkedIn is a great tool to help you with your connections. Learning how to use LinkedIn to leverage your network can be very beneficial. Successful sales people leverage their connections to get introductions to new prospects. Your sales people need to know how to properly increase the size of the network with quality connections and understand how to harness the power of the tool to research key account contacts. It is human nature to accept introductions from people that you know. Helping others better understand your ideal client profile is another key to success. They need to be able to picture your ideal prospect in their mind and make a connection to their own network. Creative questioning strategies can help people in your network think of specific people. This is a much better outcome than blank stares or the proverbial "deer in the headlight look" when you ask, "Who do you know that might be able to use our product or service?"

What about those prospects to whom your sales force can't find a connection? What can they do to get that first conversation to set up that first appointment? We recommend that you court them over an extended period of time with multiple contacts. Through periodic, consistent and substantive contacts with the target account, one can start to build a level of trust and personal connection. When that competitor stumbles on their customer service—and they will—you will be the supplier that your prospect is going to think of first. Most sales people give up on contacts after 4-5 attempts within a 90-day period. Great sales people continue their plan for up to 12 contact attempts over an 18-month period. While this type of personal marketing or business development plan takes longer to develop, it can reap a steady stream of new clients when done properly.

One last thing, when you do get that conversation, what will you say or ask? Have you planned that conversation in your mind? Have you practiced that conversation?

Perhaps these insights have given you some new ideas on how to lead your sales people to break new ground and win more new business. If you want to explore this subject more with David, contact him at 214-470-5599 or David@EPOCHSalesManagement.com.