

The 6 Things you must do to Create Sales in 2010

The optimism of a new year and talk of economic growth will be a welcome relief for many sales people. I can almost hear cheers as you read this article. But will an economy that is headed in a positive direction result in more sales and better margins? The short answer is no.

An upswing in the economy in itself isn't the answer to sales performance improvement. The fact that 15% of salespeople overachieve sales targets irrespective of what the economy is doing validates this.

So what do consistently high performing salespeople do? Answer – influence their buyer's behaviour. Buyers react to economic conditions and change their behaviour. Salespeople of this calibre maximise their sales opportunities because they have developed and refined their selling skills and learnt how effectively to apply sales strategies.

Buyers have been and most are still in a state of being:

Slow to make a decision

This boils down to procrastination. The fear of making a wrong decision means that the buyer makes no decision or they invite others into the decision - making process thus stalling progress and at the same time avoiding responsibility

Price focussed

The aim with any price focus is to get the lowest cost and can include one or more of the following actions:

- i) They invite multiple suppliers to quote on their product or service needs and in some cases have introduced reverse online bidding
- ii) Long term suppliers' cost prices are checked to assure buyers that they are getting the best price. This has become more common practice
- iii) Tactics are applied to undermine the value of a supplier's product or service. One such tactic is to refer to it as a commodity.

Minimise responsibility

Suppliers are expected to take on a greater share of responsibility through extended warranties and payment terms, shorter ROI time frames, reduced installation times and other guarantees. The buyer wants to shift the greater share of responsibility to the supplier. Though it's early days yet buyers appear to be holding onto these behaviours and you can expect to experience one or more of these behaviours in the foreseeable future.

So what can we do to influence buyer behaviour?

1) Be superior at asking questions

Sales people are generally reasonable at asking questions but reasonable won't cut it in 2010. The bar of expectation by clients and prospects is higher.

Uncovering an issue in itself isn't enough without going more deeply into the effect of the issue. Where possible ask questions of a business as well as a personal nature. For example, "*What are the core challenges to growing sales in your division?*" This could be followed by, "*What effect has this had on your team's morale (business)... How has this impacted on you personally?*" The client or prospect will not only be mentally engaged but also emotionally involved

2) Client relationships

Continue to build on your credibility and trust, particularly with your long term clients. Too often salespeople fall into the trap of taking long term clients for granted which is the knockout for the relationship and for business. Build your personal and business knowledge with every client visit. Regularly reinforce your personal commitment to them by, for example, sending newspaper or magazine articles of interest. It will show that you care and are thinking of them.

3) Differentiate yourself

Differentiation is always from the client or prospect perspective and separates you from all the competitor alternatives they have available. It is the most effective strategy to lock out your competitors. What one client values may be different from what another does and it's organic. In other words it does change. Begin by asking questions as outlined previously. This will show the buyer you are seeking a deeper level of understanding of their problems or opportunities and they are more important to you than your pushing a product or service

4) Reach out

This means regularly setting time aside to prospect for new business. This can include networking, email, phone calls, drop-in visits and sending some correspondence by standard mail. Develop a creative prospecting campaign so the prospect keeps your name front of mind. One or two contacts don't constitute a campaign.

If you rely on existing clients to generate sales your pool of sales opportunities will provide an ever diminishing return so it's vital to prospect regularly.

5) Referrals

There are only two types of referrals -- cold or hot. Unfortunately too many salespeople work from cold referrals and don't know it. A cold referral is one where the prospect doesn't know you and is not expecting your call.

This typically happens when the salesperson has been given a name and phone number and told to call. A hot referral is one where the prospect knows who the caller is and is expecting the call. It is easy to ask a few qualifying questions to convert a cold referral to a hot one. For example, "*Why do you think Jenny would be interested... Who is their current supplier?*" Ask the client to call the prospect and let them know you will be contacting them. The prospect will then be expecting your call. Hot referrals result in qualified prospects and a reduced selling cycle.

6) Improve your selling skills

Just as outstanding sports people use coaches to continue to improve, so do high performing salespeople. Ask yourself when you last did a sales course. Much has changed in business in the previous 12-18 months and so have people. Many are better educated and better informed thanks to the internet.

Look for a sales training company or sales coach that can add real value to your current skills set and one you can work with over a period of time.

You do have influence over buyer behaviour and perhaps more that you give yourself credit for. It's up to you how you position that influence to sell more and at better margins.



Kurt's expertise is in sales strategy, sales management development; group structured sales training and infield sales coaching. As a sales person he has successfully sold products and services in 4 major market/product segments: new product sales, consultative sales, relationship sales and retail. During his selling career he created sales records for three companies in two industries and won many sales awards for outstanding performance