

More to Manage, Less Time to Sell

04/02/07

There's so much opportunity out there, and as owner of this company, I've always been the major rainmaker. I'm comfortable with sales, in fact I like sales, am pretty good at it, and feel better when I've been out in the field selling to potential new customers. The problem is that, as this company grows, I get to spend less and less time doing sales. I keep getting sucked back into the office, dealing with whatever.

There's more to manage, now that the business has grown. And I have more people, which results in more problems to solve. If I don't figure out how to stay out in the field, doing more sales, we could be in real trouble.

There are two solution areas I want to look at, today. One is figuring out how to add staff effectively, and the second is figuring out how to grow more business from the office. I'd like to challenge this owner's assumption that sales depends on the owners being out in the field.

Let's start by looking at the second issue, how to add sales while staying in the office. The internet is a great tool for boosting sales while sticking close to home. Having a website from which to conduct business would be a big help.

When developing a website selling operation, here are a few

items to keep in mind. Remember that your website is first and foremost a selling operation. Select a target audience. Then target graphics, message, offer, and overall culture of the website to match your target audience. If you're selling to more than one target audience, consider two websites, so you don't lose buyers just because they run into a look with which they can't identify.

Build trust with your audience by using secure pages for transactions. Use testimonials to boost confidence in your company. And remember, people do business with people they know. Use that to your advantage by building an "about us" page that helps your visitors get to know you.

Get people to take action with you by using special offers and offering free stuff, including advice. Know that the first transaction is the hardest one for any buyer; help new visitors get over that hurdle by making it easy, and small. Try using information exchange as a way of getting a transaction to happen – offer buyers information or leads to things they want. Add a discussion forum if possible, in order get engagement.

Create a place on the website for customer service. Just like people shopping in department stores need a place to go for help, so do customers on-line. Make it easy,

friendly, no-hassle for customers to do what they need to do with you. The department stores learned a long time ago that hassle free return goods was a good business policy. Put that lesson to use in your website.

Now let's talk about the other side of the coin: not enough staff to go around. Focus on customer service: tap into the full potential of a new client by having a robust customer service operation in place, concentrating on getting to know everything about new customers, and finding ways to expand the amount of business you do with your customers.

Give customer service staff goals for expanding new business. Give them incentives to grow the base they have. Reward the people who step up to the plate by getting more and more sales from existing and new customers.

Reorganize the tasks your employees perform, in order to free them up from more mundane tasks that new employees could more easily do. Look at what's taking up time and think of ways to use temporary staff to solve the problem. Tap into the potential of temporary workers to either support customer service, or free up people within your organization who can do more to expand customer service.

Try temp to perm agencies, who allow you to convert temporary workers to permanent full time

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staff, if you find some who is great, and if you need the additional staff full time. Don't forget that when taking on temporary workers, you only pay for the hours and days that you need staff.

As you think about bringing additional employees on board, whether temporary or permanent, there are a number of things you can do to insure that you get the most out of them, and that you don't get tied up managing them. Plan out needs, and share those specifics with any agencies that are searching for candidates on your behalf. Make it clear to agencies that you won't accept mediocre candidates. Reassure current employees that you're looking to expand, not replace. Have office space – desk, computer, and phone, procedures in writing – all set and ready to go. Assign a permanent employee to work with the temp or new hire, until they're up to speed. Set benchmarks, so that the new people can measure progress, and assign a permanent employee to track and report on those. Consider hiring any temporary employees who show themselves as strong, capable players, if the increase in business warrants it.

Those suggestions should help you get more sales, with less running around and less effort on your part. Good luck!

Looking for a good book? Try

Selling The Invisible by Harry Beckwith, 2001.

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