

Selling Season is Here!

09/15/08

We do a lot of sales between September and year end. And that sets up the New Year for us, so it's critical we do well in this period. I feel like our sales approach is getting stale. Any suggestions for making sure we hit our numbers in the next few months?

I get questions from people all the time, asking what is the magic bullet that leads to success in sales. In my experience it's not about a magic bullet. Sales success in small business is about paying attention to the basics.

You want your people to be out there asking the right questions, gathering good data, picking the right targets and using these basics to close each sale. Teach everyone in the company about the importance of new business. Continuously invest in sales training for people on the front line. Have a sales process and know it works. Keep the interest of your sales people focused on your most profitable sales.

Here are 10 questions, and a rating system, you can use to assess your company's sales basics. Rate your company's ability to answer each question from 1 (low) to 4 (high).

1. Do we have a sales process we've agreed to, and is it written down, including the top 3 questions we want our sales

people to ask every prospect, right off the bat?

2. Do we know our conversion ratios: leads : appointments : identify prospects' needs : confirm interest : proposal : close?

3. Do we know the attributes of a good quality prospect, and do we have a good way, early on in the sales process, of getting rid of prospects that are low profit, low quality or unlikely to close?

4. Do we have a written sales pipeline that everyone in sales updates weekly, that we can use to accurately forecast future revenue?

5. How well do all sales people understand the difference between open ended and closed ended questions, and when to use each?

6. How well do we build rapport with prospects on business issues, such as understanding the prospects' business needs and relating that to what our company stands for, rather than on personal issues such as social relationships and sporting events?

7. Do we have a list of 5-10 items that set the company apart from its competition, and if so, do our clients and prospects know, understand and agree to the value of those items?

8. Are we good at getting to the decision maker early on, instead of getting stuck working with people who can only recommend us?

9. Are all of the people in sales talking to enough prospect targets, asking the right questions, moving the right prospects through the pipeline in a timely fashion, and staying out the trap of counting on a few sales targets to hit their numbers?

10. Does everyone in the company understand they are in sales and do they all know what they can do to help grow revenue and add to the company's list of clients?

How did your company do? Score of 15 or less means your company would do well to get help now! Interview sales training companies and set aside a budget for sales skill development. Ask your sales people what help they need in order to improve results. Look at benchmark companies who are doing well in sales and find out what they're doing differently.

Score of 16-34 means you're doing a lot of things right, focus on fixing the low scoring areas. Look at the low scoring questions (those rated 1 or 2) and see if there's a common theme. Are there specific weaknesses in terms of sales process, sales skills, targets, forecasts? Identify



Trusted Advisor to Business Owners

Selling Season is Here!

09/15/08

one specific area of weakness to focus on for the next 6 months. Monitor sales results to see if improvements lead to more or better sales.

Score of 35+ means your company is strongly headed for sales success; focus on marketing to fill your pipeline. Once your company has mastered the sales basics, it's time to focus on marketing. Get more leads in, to make it easier for sales people to do their job well.

You can use lead generation as a competitive weapon. Educate competitors' clients about what they might be missing. Lure sales people who are looking for a better environment to work in, which includes plenty of high quality leads to work with. Select high quality clients, and walk away from low quality, because you can afford to. Hit your long and short term sales and profit targets, creating more bottom line funds to fuel future sales and marketing efforts.

Looking for a good book? Try *Coaching Sales People Into Sales Champions: A Tactical Playbook for Managers and Executives* by Keith Rosen.

Business owners regularly turn to Ask Andi and Strategy Leaders for advice on how to grow profitable, successful companies. They find what they need time after time. Specific advice is available at www.AskAndiBlog.com. Ask Andi is also published weekly in the Westchester and Fairfield County Business Journals and Hudson Valley Business. Written by Strategy Leaders President, Andi Gray, the Ask Andi column is a rich source of advice for owners of established, privately held businesses.

If you are a business owner and you have a question or would like to discuss some aspect of your business, call [1.877.238.3535](tel:18772383535) or send an email to AskAndi@StrategyLeaders.com.