

## Concerted effort key to building leads

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**“Our pipeline of leads isn't as wide now as it was coming into this year. In addition, some of our old reliable clients just aren't around anymore. What suggestions do you have to help us set up for a strong start to 2010? “**

A full pipeline in small business comes from sales efforts backed up by a strong marketing program. Networking, cold calling and asking for referrals are all part of the sales program. Track results to insure that no leads get wasted. Build a mix of leads from old customers who want additional services and new customers who will buy what you already sell. Focus on sources of new customers to replace those trusty old customers who don't make it through the recession.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Are we doing enough to keep the company visible?
- When we do go to events, do we bring back the right kinds of leads?
- Is it time to look for new places to network?
- When do we get out together to knock on doors?
- What are we doing to ask our clients and vendors for leads?
- What kinds of lead generation groups do we belong to?
- What kind of conversion are we seeing from leads that come in the door?
- Who does the best job of getting leads and converting them to sales?

Assign specific lead generation responsibilities to each member of the sales team. Attend networking events regularly. Ask your clients where they hang out. Go with satisfied clients and get introduced to other leads by your referral source.

Cold call in the right neighborhood by researching target lists. Dress well and have a professional looking handout in order to make an impact. Prepare a few questions to qualify people you meet for follow up or deletion from your list. Cold calling done right can be one of the most effective ways to initially connect with potential prospects.

Coming out of a recession, successful companies are busy. Things are starting to take off and there's not enough time in the day to do everything. Couch your cold calling presentation in terms that busy buyers will be more likely to respond to: cost saving, time saving, easy to work with, great for companies that are growing.

Tell good customers you're looking for leads to more clients who are just like them. Set up appointments to meet with clients and go through their Rolodex of contacts. Tell customers you need their help and would appreciate two leads, and that you'll be calling later in the week to follow up. You may be surprised at how many customers will be able to help you expand your pipeline.

Ask vendors for leads as well. Meet with the sales reps of your key vendors. Offer to help them find leads as they help you build your pipeline. Set up a group of sales-oriented vendors to meet with monthly to exchange information on opportunities.

Join a networking group. Don't be afraid of a requirement to have to exchange leads. It's good training to have to look for leads for other people. Tuning up lead opportunities and figuring out what to do with them is a good discipline to have if you're planning to succeed in sales.

Track results. Many companies run a sales blitz, focus on closing a few of the most promising leads and then run out of leads to work on. This cycle of feast or famine can be very unproductive. Break through by identifying opportunities that, while not right today, have potential for the future. Develop a "drip" campaign, to regularly be in front of prospects until they're ready to talk seriously about what your company does.

Look at who in your organization does a better than average job of attracting qualified leads. Ask them to meet with you to describe what it is they do in a typical day, week, and month. Model two or three of their successful actions into a program that everyone in the organization can follow.

A lot of loyalties are shifting as companies emerge from the recession. Now is the time to weed out your customer list. Let go of companies that are dying, even if they've been great customers in the past. Go after companies that have a real value proposition, are attracting great customers, have cash flow to pay their bills and are intent on growing so they can consume more of what your company produces as time goes on.

Looking for a good book? Try "Coaching Salespeople into Sales Champions: A Tactical Playbook for Managers and Executives" by Keith Rosen.

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