

Winning Sales Strategies of Top Performers

by Barbara Sanfilippo

To achieve the critical edge over your competition, consider these seven sales strategies of top performers.

ATTRACT BUSINESS TO YOU

Imagine being flooded with phone calls and emails from hot prospects requesting information on your products and services. Top performers have a philosophy that works. "Don't make cold calls - attract warm calls."

By infiltrating key target markets and positioning yourself as "the expert", you can achieve celebrity status in your niche. To do this, simply ask your best customers and prospects three key questions:

1. What professional industry association do you belong to?
2. What industry magazines, journals or newsletters do you read?
3. Would you be willing to help me by guiding me on how I can join, attend or speak at your association meeting and submit an article for your industry publication?

I remember advising Mark, a sales rep years ago after a workshop. At the time he was struggling selling advertising space for a newspaper. As I suggested, he went back to some satisfied customers for help. One of his customers was a printer and suggested he get involved with his state printing association. Mark joined the association, attended the meetings, spoke at one meeting and wrote a series of mini-articles in their newsletter. As a result, his business increased significantly and he is enjoying his celebrity status in the printing industry.

ESTABLISH CREDIBILITY AND DIFFERENTIATE

How can you stand out from the pack of sales professionals and consultants all offering similar services? It certainly helps to package yourself professionally. Consider including the following items in your promotional package:

- A jazzy bio sheet listing your experience, training, certifications and industry associations, etc. (This is not a resume.)
- Your personal mission statement describing your commitment to your customers.
- Your service standards and guarantee.
- Client testimonial letters.
- Articles published in your industry, trade magazines and newsletters or those read by your customer.

PREPARE, PREPARE, AND PLAN YOUR CALLS

Today's customers and prospects have very little time to waste. They want solutions. A sales consultant who demonstrates a keen understanding of customers needs and shows up "prepared" will earn the business.

Gathering information on your prospect and the company is critical to your success. Try the following suggestions:

1. Review their web site.
2. Call ahead for the latest product brochure and annual report.
3. Ask for a copy of their strategic or marketing plan and see if you can tie your service to the strategic goals of your customers.
4. Ask for a copy of the organization chart to get familiar with the various departments and identify key decision makers.
5. Ask for some staff and customer newsletters.
6. Interview a few of the key people in advance of your meeting.

In addition to reviewing key documents, it's helpful to review the following questions in advance:

1. What is your objective for the call?
2. Who is your competitor for the business and how are you better?
3. What services do you anticipate this customer needs?
4. What key "open-probing" questions will you ask?
5. What are the benefits you will stress?
6. What are the most difficult objections that may arise?
7. Who are the key decision makers and influencers?
8. What will be your closing statement or next step?

COACH AND CRITIQUE YOUR SALES CALLS

When was the last time you had a sales manager or respected peer critique your call? It's amazing how sloppy we can get over the years and not even know it. Top performers never say, "I'm a seasoned sales professional." Seasoned sometimes stands for stagnant. Superstars are like Olympic athletes -- always looking to improve their performance.

Can you guess what the top three weakest areas are for most sales professionals? Number one is probing, particularly open-probing. Most salespeople talk too much and listen too little. Second is not asking for the business. Finally, many sales professionals are unprepared and waste the prospect's time.

So why not decide to be the best? Ask to be critiqued. Invite a sales superstar to be your coach and mentor and take them on a call.

COMPETE ON SERVICE NOT PRICE

Chances are there will always be a competitor who can beat your price and a customer looking for the lowest price. We can rarely win at the price game, however, we can compete on service.

Most customers will pay a little extra if they can be sure of receiving reliable, dependable and consistent service. To become a more customer-focused sales professional, try the following:

1. Randomly sample at least 5-10 customers a week or month to rate their satisfaction. For relationship sales, conduct a quarterly or annual client review meeting with your best customers.
2. Survey your customers to find out what they expect from your product or service and what good service means to them. Use the information to create measurable or verifiable written service standards.

BE PERSISTENT AND CONSISTENT

Top performers don't give up easily -- they are persistent. Most sales professionals will call a prospect 2-3 times, nearly half will follow up 4-5 times and only the top 10% will make the 6-10 contacts necessary to get the business. These 10% have a good sense of who is likely to buy and who is a qualified prospect. A brief email, handwritten note, article or fax is all you need to keep your name in front of the prospect.

The key is to have an excellent contact management system such as Goldmine to keep conversation notes, determine the next step and schedule a reminder call or note. Be persistent in your sales efforts and consistent in your follow-up!

DREAM BIG! -- MAKE A DREAM BOARD

While waiting for your sales to increase and your dreams to appear, it's important to focus on success and avoid discouragement. Pictures are a powerful visual reminder of your future dreams because they impact your emotions and increase your desire. Bob and I took pictures of Mediterranean dream homes around the San Diego area several years ago even though we did not have the money. We looked at the photos often and imagined living in a spacious, light home with canyon views. A year later a builder sold us one of the distressed homes for nearly half price and we moved into our dream home shortly thereafter.

An average performer believes, "A dream is a fantasy event in my life never meant to occur." A top performer believes, "A dream is a future event in my life waiting to occur." To increase your sales effortlessly and achieve your life's dreams, you must believe you deserve it. Act as if your dream is coming and make your own "Dream Board."

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