



Upward Bound

Surefire Ways to Boost Sales Productivity

Even a stellar product or service doesn't guarantee robust sales, which is why great sales teams seek out better ways to find good customers and build great relationships with them. These strategies will help your sales team bring in new business and expand existing accounts.

IMPLEMENT THE RIGHT CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT (CRM) SYSTEM

Companies that understand their customers better achieve higher customer satisfaction and brand awareness. The right CRM system promotes that process by telling you what's working -- which pitches, which pricing, which prospects, which reps.

Keeping your company's needs in mind, have your sales team create a list of features that your CRM tool must have. Once you have a short list of CRM solutions that qualify, ask vendors for in-depth demonstrations. When you've decided on an application, you may want to hire a CRM integration firm to help you implement such a complex tool. While you're at it, evaluate custom add-ons like Access Hoover's, which brings unlimited prospecting information straight into your CRM.

MAKE SURE YOU ACHIEVE 100 PERCENT ADOPTION OF THE CRM TOOL

Having a CRM is pointless if only a few salespeople use it. Before you launch your CRM project, be sure to get support at every level from the executive suite to the sales floor -- and across organizational silos, too, since a successful implementation will involve not only sales, but also IT, marketing, and finance.

Involve your sales team early in the process. Ask them what functions would make their jobs easier and more productive. Show your sellers the benefits of using the CRM. Once you adopt a solution, be ready to discipline them, too: make it clear that using the CRM religiously is a non-negotiable part of their jobs.

MANAGE YOUR FUNNEL

Use your CRM to connect knowledge of your prospects with your own sales funnel. You need to know how many calls it takes to set an appointment, how many appointments it takes to generate a contract, and how long it takes to go from a contract to a done deal. "Once you know your funnel, you can scale up the process. And then the world is your oyster," says Mike McKean, CEO of The Knowland Group.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Investing a little more time in lead qualification and call prep can save you a bundle in the end. Flesh out your CRM's profile on a prospect company by using business information resources like Hoover's to examine a prospect's financial history, executive bios, parent and subsidiary companies, and other pertinent data. Access Hoover's automates this process by seamlessly integrating data points into CRMs such as Salesforce, Oracle, and Microsoft Dynamics.

Again, you must show your reps -- who never want to "waste" time on "extra" research -- that this homework *shortens* the sales cycle, because it allows them to walk in the door knowing what they need to make a highly relevant pitch.

PUT YOUR PRODUCT ON PAUSE FOR THE FIRST HALF OF THE SALES CALL

"When I coach salespeople, I ask them not to talk about their solutions for the first half of the call," says sales consultant Lisa Earle McLeod. "This simple rule forces the sales rep to focus exclusively on the customer, and it's amazing how much more productive the calls are." When your reps listen this way, and when they've done their homework ahead of time, they can hold a consultative discussion based on your company's value proposition, rather than a shortcut negotiation based on price.

MANAGE YOUR SALES TEAM'S TIME

A focused sales force is a productive sales force, so use your CRM to help your sellers manage their time. Don't stand over their shoulders like a schoolmarm, but do make it clear that you'll help them spend more time closing deals. Have them track interruptions during the day -- the average interruption costs a rep 24 minutes of productivity -- and let them know that multitasking makes each task take longer and leads to more mistakes. As much as possible, integrate all the tools your reps will need directly into the CRM so they don't lose time switching between apps.

Selling will always be a hard job, but there's no reason to make it harder than it has to be. Follow these strategies for success, and watch your sales team blow through its numbers quarter after quarter. ■

Hoover's is the top business information provider in the world. For more information on how Hoover's can enhance your CRM system and sales productivity, visit www.crm.hoovers.com.