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# Synergy Builds A Foundation For Multiple-Line Selling

by JOHN HASKELL

Most independent sales representatives will avoid discussion of other principals when they meet with regional managers or other members of the principal's marketing and sales team. In addition, most reps do not make any effort to show their line card to principal personnel. Many reps are paranoid about having their principals know how many, or what lines they have.

Fortunately, for most reps, the majority of principals do not understand synergistic selling and have no interest in discussing other lines. An agency's line card can serve as the premier tool to rectify this situation in a proactive back-selling program. The line card serves as the launching pad for getting the principal's personnel to understand why the rep does a great job. From the initial interview, to the follow-up visits — to the

times when lines are added or deleted — the line card is the rep firm's most important presence in the market, so don't hide it from your principals.

- What does your line card look like?
- Is it a real marketing and sales piece, or just a listing?
- Is there a clear statement of your strategy for creating synergy?

One independent sales representative, who had previously been a purchasing agent, was a

major customer of many of the reps in one of our seminars. During the seminar he asked, "Do you know what I used to do with reps' line cards?"

I was prepared for the worst. Perhaps he would say, "I tossed them in the round file." Fortunately, he came through, saying, "I found the line cards to be extremely valuable. I set up an indexed three-ring binder so that I could get to reps' lines quickly and easily. This really worked for me!"

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## Line Cards Tell the Story

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***The most important reason for the existence of a line card is to have a clear and consistent "story" about your business.***

That example shows just one of the hundreds of reasons your line card is so important.

The most important reason for the existence of a line card is to

have a clear and consistent “story” about your business. Multiple-line selling is your business. This fact should be a part of every discussion you have with your principals. How does multiple-line selling benefit them? Every time you talk to a regional manager, vice president of sales or the president of the company, you should have a backselling message about your lines all the time.

### What Can you Say?

- “I just acquired the ABC line, and it’s a perfect fit with your line. By getting ABC, I will be able to get an opportunity to show our newest products to the best customers, who up ‘til now have not thought of us in this market.”
- When presenting the line card to the new regional manager, you may say, “Charlie, I’m really glad to have you here in our territory. We have a full disclosure policy and all of our lines are on our line card. I’d like to review it with you to show you how your line fits within our synergistic package. Multiple-line selling really works for us, as you’ll see after we go through the line card.”
- When presenting the line card to a new customer you could say, “I really appreciate the opportunity to present our complete package to you. We have constructed a truly synergistic package of lines. As you will see, each line we represent works in your market. I will never waste your time on a product that I don’t think makes sense for you, or your engineers. All of our lines offer distinct advantages that I will present, and all of our factories are very responsive to your needs.” Imagine the backselling power of that

little presentation when a regional manager, or other factory person, is traveling with you.

- When presenting the line card to a potential employee you may say, “Susan, we have been particularly careful about taking lines on, and here is our line card. We use it proactively with our customers and principals. One of the first things you’ll be expected to do is develop your own presentation of the line card. It’s important to us that every member of our team understands every line and why it’s a part of our rep firm’s package.” Think about this scenario as it relates to what a potential employee will hear from other rep firms she interviews.

### New Line = New Backselling Opportunity

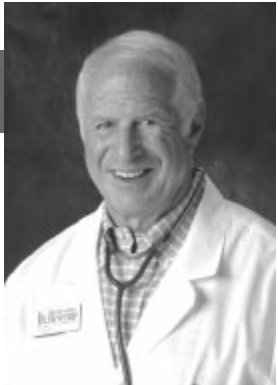
You won. You got the line. Now what? As a proactive part of your backselling program, you want to announce your win to all of your principals immediately. You definitely don’t want the sales manager at your biggest principal to hear from someone else that you took on a new line. This is especially true if the new line is a large one that pays very good commission.

Principals are always quite jealous of their position with you. If you don’t tell them about the new line and how it fits in your package, their paranoia will kick in.

Furthermore, hopefully, the new line is strong and can pull all of your other lines along with it. When you take on a really good one, every line, or at least most, in your bag should get a lift.

When one office products rep firm I worked with lost a major line, which was 20 percent of its commission income, all of our

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preparation and organization paid off. Our profile and well-constructed PowerPoint presentation helped us land a major international brand — BIC. The line we lost was well known, but not many lines are like BIC.

In the office products market, getting BIC on your line card is almost like a good housekeeping seal. Every sales manager knows BIC and every one of them knows BIC can open doors for their line. By proactively backselling our line acquisition, we allayed any fears that the sales managers had as a result of our big line loss, and we proved ourselves to be real winners.

Your line card presents your synergistic package. Proactively using your line card as a part of your complete marketing and sales plan helps you achieve prosperity, stability and respect throughout your market — especially in the minds of the principals you represent.

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