



KEEP YOUR SALES UP EVEN IN A DOWN MARKET

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REPRINTED FROM

agency sales[®] magazine

June 2009 • Vol. 39, no. 06

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Salespeople are being hammered in today's economic environment. Entire market segments have evaporated. Customers and companies are holding back orders or literally have no money to buy. Opportunities and new prospects are fewer and further between. **In 2008, many salespeople earned only half the commission they earned in 2007. Half! When you take a 50 percent pay cut, you know what a recession feels like.**

But not all sales professionals are in a slump. Some are thriving. Some are busy growing their client base and making good money despite the uncertainty around them. And you can do the same. Your commitment to success starts with a dedication to your goals and where you want to be; remember the basics, and then go beyond. Some salespeople will take the safe road this year, ratcheting down their expectations. You'll hear them say: "I just want to survive," or "I need to make it through this." When you plan just to get by, that's exactly what you do – get by. When you plan and expect to succeed, it's a different story. As one astute sales manager once said: "Most salespeople reach the level of expectation they set for themselves." He's right on.

If you want to be one of those who will thrive this year, apply these tips now:

Don't wait for things to change. Unlike struggling salespeople who sit on the sidelines hoping for an economic U-turn any day now, the best salespeople are taking action and moving forward. They recognize the economy may be in this mess for years, and waiting and watching is a poor strategy for success. The movers and shakers are moving and shaking; setting up appointments, making sales calls and presentations, contacting their current and past customers and marketing like never before. Their proactive approach is creating opportunities, leads and sales. In boom times or in bad times, you can never wait for customers to find you. It's your job to reach out and find them.

Work harder. Top salespeople understand this age-old axiom: *You can't make more money with less effort.* That's why they are working harder and putting in more hours than ever before. Think about this: Arriving just 30 minutes earlier and staying 30 minutes later each day equates to an additional 20 hours every month. When you are working 20 hours more than the average salesperson, you can make at least 20 percent more contacts, and even 20 percent more sales.

Talk to the right people. Some companies may want or need your product or service, but if they can't make a decision or are restrained by shrinking budgets, it doesn't matter. Successful salespeople today are selective about where and with whom they spend their time. They are out looking for "real" buyers: customers and prospects who have both money and ability to buy. Every minute you spend with an unqualified prospect is another minute you don't have had

to find a qualified one. Remember: *You can't close a sale with a customer who can't buy.*

Make more contacts. Selling is a contact sport. When times are good, business is easier to come by. Sure, there's competition, concern about price and sales don't exactly just fall into your lap. But contrast the last few years of relative prosperity to what we see today, and it's quite a different picture. Customers are more cautious, more apprehensive and spending decisions take longer. This means to land more sales, you have to make more contacts. When capture and conversion rates go *down*, to maintain a steady volume of business, your sales contacts have to go *up*. Top producers get this. Do you?

Change the way you work. Is change difficult? You bet! That's why so many salespeople fall behind or fail. Successful salespeople have stayed successful through the years by evolving and adapting to change. As the economy and buyer habits change, smart salespeople learn to do business in new ways. By reviewing trade publications, reading top books on selling, and attending industry conferences, client events and networking among successful peers, you are able to learn and apply new marketing approaches and sharpen your face-to-face skills. This is how you stay current, fresh and on top of your game.

While all of this may sound like the old "back to basics" line of attack, it's truly more than that. Successful salespeople in today's market have gone *beyond* the basics in most everything they do. They understand that roughly the top 20 percent of every sales force produces about 80 percent of most company's sales results. To get and stay in that top 20 percent, you have to be willing to give and do 20 percent more than almost everyone else. That's not only what gives you your edge, it allows you to keep your sales up – even in a down market.

This year may not be the best year you've ever had, but it doesn't have to be your worst. Take advantage of the fact that most of your competition has pulled back, slowed down, and in some cases, completely left the business. Now is the time to push forward. You have a window of opportunity in front of you, and how you use that window is up to you.

Douglas Smith is a nationally recognized speaker and sales trainer who helps organizations and sales professionals sell smarter and better. To contact Smith, call Douglas Smith & Associates at 877-430-2329 or visit www.DougSmithPresents.com.

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