


# Mastering Productive Tech Tools

BY JACK FOSTER



Sage advice sometimes crops up in the most unexpected places. For instance, earlier this summer at the beginning of a television police show/comedy entitled, “The Good Guys,” one character advises another: “Instead of criticizing technology, why not learn how to use it?” That philosophy fits neatly into the subject emphasized in this issue of *Agency Sales* magazine.

Probably at no time before in history has technology impacted us more in general — and independent manufacturers’ reps specifically. Years ago, veteran reps maintain, all they needed to perform their jobs was a car full of gas, samples in the trunk, a bag full of change for the payphone and a well-maintained day planner to track their schedules.

Gradually, but probably a lot faster than makes any of us feel comfortable, technology reared its productive head and gave us in rapid succession everything from the fax machine to cell and Smartphones, Internet, PCs, laptops, PDAs, Blackberries, etc. You get it! The world has changed and the rep had better change with it unless he wants to be the last dinosaur left in the office to turn out the lights.

Consultant, speaker and author Steve Turner probably knows as much as anyone else about the technological tools that independent reps use on a daily basis. What he knows much more than anyone else, however, is how to use those tools more productively and efficiently. The rep who listens to his advice stands a pretty good chance of successfully getting out of the office long before the lights have been turned off.

### Maximizing Technology

Where Turner makes his mark as he works with various rep firms and other constituencies, is to educate them on the best ways to maximize their technological efforts.

According to Turner, who heads Turner Time Management, a Chicago-based firm that offers productivity training on computers and other electronic tools, the list of technological tools appear-

ing at the beginning of this article pretty much covers what the rep should be working with. “Working with reps as much as I do, however, I’ve learned that by and large they haven’t mastered the operation of those tools. The best way I can explain how too many people work with technology is by saying we generally go out and buy a new computer and begin working with it. When it stops working to our satisfaction we call IT to fix it. IT’s job is just to fix it and take care of our immediate low-hanging fruit. Their real job isn’t to make you more productive. It’s up to the rep himself to make himself more productive and he can only do that by maximizing the performance of these tools.”

A key to Turner’s message is his emphasis on the word “time” as it appears in his company’s name. According to the consultant, “We usually never seem to have enough time. In this day of high technology we sell technology, but we don’t always use it to make ourselves more effective in our own daily business activities.”

He continues, “I’ve found that there is a world of difference between how we as business people currently operate our computers and how we should operate them to best achieve our business goals and most importantly, to give ourselves time for our families, friends, and our lifelong pursuits. By creating a methodology to regularly optimize my computer for best performance, become more productive with e-mail, organize my files and create shortcuts to quickly get to applications, files and folders, I began putting automatic daily deposits into my productivity bank. Now I take those deposits out as time.

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Steve Turner

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Without being a time management guru, you too can leverage technology by using a variety of simple techniques, tips and tools to put time on your side.”

### **Lack of Productivity**

Among the many techniques Turner espouses, he cites the lack of productivity accompanying the use of e-mail. “I’d maintain that a major error made by many is to not maximize e-mail as an effective business tool. Consider for a moment that 75% of the business calls we make wind up in voice mail. How do you get around that? How can you get in touch with the customer? If you have savvy marketing tools accompanying your e-mail you can reach the customer.”

He adds that some people have achieved success in their efforts at communicating marketing messages to customers in a video format. The key here is to consider changing the way you’ve always conducted business. “The world is changing too fast for most of us,” he explains. “Channels are changing and the world is shrinking. For any of us to think we’re dealing with the same captive audience we dealt with in the past is a serious error. You simply may not have that captive audience you enjoyed in the past. Your job is to provide yourself with the opportunity to enhance, protect and grow your relationships with your clients. And whatever you do, remember that technology should work for you, not you for it.”

### **Social Media**

When it comes to the ever-growing phenomena of the social media, Tuner maintains that “while

it’s still in its infancy for true business-to-business applications, the fact is social media will grow in importance. I’d say that we’ve already seen results for social media applications when it comes to retail selling where people have a product that bloggers, for instance, have a desire to write about. The retail area is closer than most other areas in getting results.” He adds, “The secret to cost-effective social media networking is the consistent communication with customers, potential customers and vendors by building relationships centered around your products and services by addressing your friends’ and followers’ needs.”

Having said that, Turner recommends something like LinkedIn as being the most effective social media communication tool. “LinkedIn is really going to be the Rolodex of the future. Keep in mind that people who are entering the workplace today as decision makers are more tech savvy than in the past. In the procurement process and in management channels, they’re going to be searching for people and they’re going to be doing their searching on LinkedIn.”

Finally, whenever the subject of technology is raised, the question is asked “Does high-tech mean high touch?” Turner’s answer to that question is “Not if you don’t use it properly. If you truly personalize your efforts it can result in high touch. Here’s the problem, however — you’re not going to reach your customers and prospects on the phone each day. What you’ve got to do is to touch them in other ways. Whether that means social networking, e-mail, video, it all depends upon what works best for you.” 