

Do You Need Faster Feet... Or A New Game Plan?

When sales are down, management often responds by urging the sales force to “move your feet faster.” Although the directive might not include those exact words (it could be a demand for more proposals or sales calls or...), the underlying message is the same: “Do even more of what you’ve been doing.” Unfortunately, this attempt to increase sales is usually ineffective at best. Frequently, it just further frustrates an already downtrodden sales force.

Just Ask a Coach...

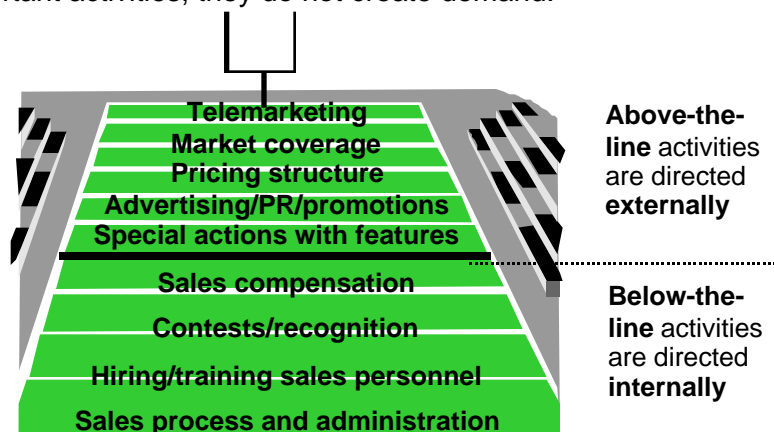
While it’s understandable to assume that if you hire qualified sales people, they should be able to “make things happen,” a better way of looking at it is through the analogy of sports teams. Even with good players, teams need an effective playbook and ongoing, strategic adjustments to the game plan to win consistently.

Good sales reps are no different. They need innovative programs that make it easier to buy from them. These programs must be creative approaches that provide a clear point of differentiation from the competition – something the reps can get their arms around and confidently offer as a valuable solution to their customers. Not only do fresh, timely business strategies facilitate the sale, they also inject the sales force with much-needed motivational energy when times are hard. In a sense, they provide the traction that enables faster feet. To keep sales momentum going, companies need to introduce new programs two to six times per year.

Where to Focus Your Plays

Retailers long ago grasped the concept of driving sales. They routinely have built excitement around offerings to accelerate the shopper’s buying process. The banking industry is another segment that continuously innovates new ways to attract and retain customers. These industries set their sights – and a large portion of their resources – on getting to the end zone.

In contrast, the business-to-business company has been slow to shift from demanding more sales *activity* to creating programs that drive more *sales*. Leadership in the B2B market tends to be highly product/service-centric, convinced that the offering will sell itself. As a result, most companies invest 75% of their management time and resources in aspects of the business that are internally directed (“below the line” in the accompanying illustration), such as hiring and training sales personnel, sales compensation, contests/recognition, sales process, and sales administration. While these are important activities, they do not create demand.



Demand is created “above the line” – that is, in activities that are externally directed. Above-the-line activities include such things as advertising, public relations, promotions, pricing structure, special programs, telemarketing, and market coverage. When companies shift even a small percentage of their focus onto these types of activities, the results can be huge.

A Guaranteed Win

Several years ago, Xerox Corporation introduced the “Total Satisfaction Guarantee,” which gave customers the ability to demand a comparable replacement for their Xerox copier if it didn’t perform to their expectations over a three-year period. This was a tool that set Xerox apart from the competition. It gave their account reps a definite edge, making it easier for them to convince their customers that Xerox was the right choice and reduced the risk in purchasing the product.

Another example of a business strategy that has driven sales is the introduction of car leasing. These programs have made it possible for consumers to drive better cars than they could via a traditional installment purchase. The result for the auto industry has been increased sales of higher end and higher margin vehicles. These examples are with large companies and markets, but many similar situations can be found in smaller organizations.

Consult Your Players

So how should management go about creating these sales-driving programs? A good place to start is by probing sales reps to understand what causes lost sales, prolonged sales cycles, and other barriers. A full awareness of these factors equips management to develop a set of actions to counter whatever is holding back sales. Small and medium-sized companies may be short on marketing or “idea” people to dream up new approaches. Advisors and industry players, who offer extensive experience and objectivity, are tremendous resources in devising successful strategies.

For over 15 years Northpoint Advisors has been successfully helping small, medium-sized, and large companies score big on the business playing field. Northpoint Advisors assists senior executives, by studying their industry, competitors, and existing strategies to identify new opportunities. In addition to preparing comprehensive action plans, Northpoint Advisors works with senior management to ensure quick and effective execution. For more information, call 585.233.6707 or visit www.northpointadvisors.com.