

## Kick-Start the Sales Effort

Cold calling and 'solutions' partnerships: Is your company doing this right now?



DAN  
BEAULIEU

**IN LIGHT OF** current market conditions, I'm often asked what a company should do if its sales effort has stalled. For many, this problem is not going away quickly. The sales team says it is getting as much business as possible from existing customers, while potential customers report having all the suppliers they want. What's more, when you ask Sales about growth, they shrug or laugh: You are a complete idiot who evidently doesn't

read the papers. Phrases such as "Don't you know the economy is down?" or "Have you seen the market lately?" or "Fifty PCB shops closed last year" are bandied about. Perhaps you feel some sales people gleefully relay this information as justification for lack of success, as though bad news gives them the latitude to wait the downturn out; after all, there's not much else they can do. But don't let "the economy" or "down market" become substitutes for rationale. There are several things Sales can do. In fact, the best salesmen are doing them right now.

Indeed, the last thing to do is ride the year out. Inactivity is no solution. Get out there! Get in front of the customer! Here are some things each and every PCB sales person should be doing:

**Cold calling.** Oh, the dreaded cold call. Often, the more experienced the sales person, the more reluctant he is to make cold calls. Years of service are no pass, however. Great sales people make cold calls every day, from the first day of their careers to the day before retirement. Make at least three a day. Keep logs of each call and follow this plan:

- Cold call with the goal to deliver your literature to the potential customer.
- Send literature with the goal of getting a face-to-face meeting with the potential customer.
- Conduct the meeting with the potential customer with the goal of getting a quote.
- Quote the order with the goal (and the attitude) of winning the order, no matter what it takes.
- Win the order!

**Service current customers.** Keep at them, staying in touch as much as possible. Determine ways to help them with their problems. Make their problems your problems, and offer solutions. And manage your time wisely; don't fall into the trap of just visiting current customers for the sake

of having something to do. Have a purpose. Do everything you can for them, but do not confuse activity with accomplishment. It's easier to spend time with old friends – especially when those dreaded cold calls beckon – but the warm and cozy environs of old customers are no cure for your lack of sales.

**Find "solutions partners."** A down market plays no favorites; everyone gets hurt. Find a company with which together a better, more viable, more attractive solution can be offered. Partner with a design service bureau or an assembler. Partner with a board shop that covers a different niche. Production shops could partner with quickturn specialists and together provide a complete solution. Customers going offshore? Find a partner in a strategic geographic region. The point is, offer your customers a solution that will make them want to do business with you.

**"The economy" IS NO EXCUSE FOR POOR SALES.  
Shop closings mean more customers for you. Get in front of the customer!**

**Take advantage of the down market.** That's right: tough times create great opportunities. Here are a few.

- Customers are also experiencing tough times, and are shopping for better deals.
- Shops closings mean customers – at least a few – who need new PCB vendors ... Connect the dots.
- When money is tight, companies look for better, more cost-effective ways of doing things. So, provide them with better and more cost-effective ways.

These are just a few suggestions to get you going. Follow these steps – every day – and you will succeed.

There's a catch, though. These solutions work only for companies that offer flawless performance. Don't make life harder by poor performance. High-quality product, on time, every time, and at a great value is the true lifeblood for Sales – and sales.

This month, pick up that phone and call someone new. ○

DAN BEAULIEU is a founding partner in D.B. Management Group (Germantown, WI). He can be reached at 262-250-9653; dbmpcb@aol.com.