

Sales' Second Coming

Business is coming back! So what do you do about it?



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WAKE UP: business is coming back. Shops are telling me that things are getting better. We have known this for a number of months; the experts have said recovery would begin about now, and it is. Business is coming back slowly and steadily: My contacts say bookings have risen three straight months. And frankly, I prefer slow and steady to fast and erratic. When I ask where the growth rate will stabilize, the reply is: plotting the data from 1997-99 will give the growth forecast for 2002. In other words, ignore the artificial growth of 2000 and the backlash decline of 2001.

It's time to get back to work, to get in front of the customers and start selling again. I am told North America lost nearly 130 shops during this slowdown, as well as a great deal of capacity (in revenue terms). (The capacity shrink hasn't been felt because demand dropped by \$6 billion.) But guess what? That business will come back. And when it does you should be doing everything you can to get a piece of it. Chances are good that many customers will make changes to their vendor base. Here's a review of steps to take:

Get your name out.

Everyone you do business with – and could do business with – must know you are alive and well and ready to produce. Make calls; send e-mail, direct mail, and faxes, make visits: Get to them – now. Contact companies you couldn't crack in the past. Who knows, maybe some of their vendors have gone under or have been acquired by a company they don't want to do business with. Whatever the case, let your prospects know what you are doing.

Get back to the shows. Trade shows are great for displaying wares and meeting people. Moreover, they are good places to network with current, former, and prospective customers. Sponsor a booth, or share one with a reps, or just visit. What's important is to see and be seen, to make sure everyone knows you are open for business. After what the industry has been through in the past year, it is not readily evident which companies are still around.

Treat your sales people well. This is very important. Make sure you have the right sales people and treat them well. Because business hasn't been at the desired levels,

you should appreciate how important good sales people are. Listen to Sales when it guides you toward getting more business. If you need to make changes to your team, this is a good time; many good sales persons are available. The last year has caused a great deal of transitioning for employees in all areas, but particularly in sales. For some reason, when business declines, the sales staff goes first. (I'll never understand that, but that's another column). Hire stars let go elsewhere.

Treat your sales reps well. As one who makes his living finding reps for companies, I can say that good reps are worth their weight in gold. Treat good reps as partners, and give them all the information and support they need to do a great job. Have a good plan for working with reps, and stay in very close contact. Most important, pay them. Good reps represent the future of your company, keep them happy ... pay them first!

Above all, respect your customers. Now that we have been through this merciless drought we should have a

Remind everyone you do business with – and could do business with – YOU'RE ALIVE.

Make calls, send email and faxes – and visit.

strong respect for customers and what they mean to our success. We should have a much better understanding of what it means to have good customers and to what lengths to go to keep them. It's very simple: Find out what your customers want and provide it. When you make a commitment, meet it. When you promise to deliver the product on a certain date – do it. You may be sick of hearing this, but the fact remains: "Typical" delivery time is in the 80th percentile, which means that two of 10 boards delivered in this country are late! And as I mentioned a few months back, those companies that deliver on time, every time, are most successful.

Finally, enjoy the business; enjoy life with a backlog that is growing again. Appreciate it for all it's worth, and never forget the terrible lesson of 2001. Until next time, good luck and good selling. ○

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