

## Mining Your Business

This ain't no shopping mall. Don't want to prospect? Get out of the business.



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**ARE THERE ANY** true sales people these days? Does anyone prospect for new customers?

Most in sales consider themselves account managers. Some in direct sales find excuses not to leave the office such as, "If I don't stay and take care of my customers, things get screwed up and I'll spend all my time getting them back."

Independent sales reps are even worse. One of the ways I make my living is to find good independent reps – not an easy task. Certainly, many reps have been mistreated by PCB shops, and they have good reason to feel resentful. Regular readers of this space know that, for the most part, I am on the side of the reps. Reps are a great solution for companies that lack the resources to hire direct sales nationwide. They are usually better connected in their regions, are professional and well informed, and, most importantly, are on their own. They get paid when the principal gets paid: A nice deal all around ... when it works.

I've recently encountered a discouraging trend. Upon contacting reps for a certain territory, I am first asked whether my client has accounts already in that area. Next, the reps say that they lack the time and resources to prospect for new accounts. They are happy to take over existing accounts, and claim that they will be able to service and grow them. But – and this is a big but – they will not consider taking on a new principal unless there are active accounts in the territory.

Are you kidding me? What happened to the prospecting pioneer spirit? The thrill of the chase? If the client has a territory full of accounts, why would they seek a sales rep? Servicing and growing accounts is important, of course; it is critical to a company's success and growth. Yet it can be done internally. When a company looks for reps, it is searching for new business from new customers.

Frankly, if independent sales reps have no interest in finding new accounts by cold calling, footwork and persistence, then who should? Aren't they the sales professionals? Aren't they the ones we historically have relied upon to find new accounts? Isn't this how they have made their living? And how would they service those accounts? Will they simply become a go-between for the PCB shop's customer service department and the customers? In the long run, it seems that approach would tie up inside sales, which doesn't sound like a good idea.

What are we left with? Direct sales who don't leave the office because they don't trust inside sales to take care of customers. Independent sales reps too busy to mine but open

to assuming and servicing existing accounts. Which is redundant, of course, because inside sales/customer service does this. Three groups, all trying to take care of customers you already have, and absolutely no cold-calling or prospecting.

It doesn't take a Jeanne Dixon to figure out that sooner or later you will run out of customers. Sans prospecting and new customers, a business declines and dies. If you focus only on current customers (though they are important and need proper service), business will decline. Thanks to attrition, downturns, and mergers and acquisitions, the buyer landscape will change and your customer base – which is not growing – will shrink you right out of business. That's not good.

To those sales people who don't want to prospect, I offer some simple advice: Get out of the business; you are in the wrong job. Sales is supposed to sell. It finds new customers. End of story. To those who don't want to leave the office, I say, Get out of your comfort zone! Get out and sell.

### **REMOVE DESKS** if you have to, but get the sales staff out the door.

Meet someone new and sell them something. Sales is no more complicated than that.

Business owners and sales managers, push your sales people out. Take away their desks and offices if you have to, but move them out the door. Make things uncomfortable in the office; get them on the road. And once that's done, make sure that they find and visit potential new customers. Be careful they don't just go on a weekly "milk run," only visiting accounts you already have. Have them keep cold-call records. Ask them for activity reports, with emphasis on new potentials. Check their expense accounts: are they taking the same two people to lunch week after week? Urge them to cater to somebody new.

As far as your reps are concerned, give them not only encouragement but contractual incentives to find new customers. When hiring a new rep for a territory where you have existing accounts, give them those accounts at a reduced commission (to maintain), but also include responsibility for finding new accounts in the contract.

What this boils down to is that everyone has to do their job and do it well.

Sales people need to sell, and get new customers, while leaving customer service to those inside. **PCD&M**

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