



TEN ways how to improve your sales

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Improving your sales can cost money. Getting more sales people costs money. So does putting more advertising. And better sales people will probably ask for better salaries. But there are a few things, where the money is already being spent, that with very little or no extra investment can produce better results. I will discuss 10 ways in which this can be done. They are definitely not the only ways, and each point could be delved into to become a whole article in itself, but the following points should hopefully provide an interesting and fruitful overview.

1. Set some money aside and make a plan.

Make a plan of what you would like to see happen in your business that year. If a year is too long to foresee, start by going for shorter terms like 6 months or a quarter. Make ambitious but realistic goals by looking at the past performance of your company (and how that performance was achieved), and what circumstances you expect to affect your business during the time in question. If you are using an advertising agency, have a chat with them and show them your planned budget and what you expect in return. There should be an amount of discussion at this point to see whether the agency sees your budget/objectives as realistic

and how your objectives can be achieved. Even for short term plans, try to keep a small contingency budget for those special opportunities that may crop up from time to time. But make sure that the bulk of your publicity investment is well planned, and make sure everyone sticks to it.

2. Make sure you know your customers.

The more you know about your clients and customers, the better your chance of speaking their language. The easier it is for you to speak their language, the higher the chance that they will buy from you, because you will give them better value-added offers, better deals, more in line with what they want, when they

want it. You will also be able to build a better relationship with your customers, so that they keep coming back to you, and recommending you to their friends, family and neighbours. On a more basic level, knowing who your customers are should help you channel your publicity budget into the right opportunities for maximum effect.

3. Research which media are best suited for your sales.

Look for facts and figures, and not what you or your agency think. Market research is many times seen as an avoidable expense, but that is bad mistake

Besides getting to know your customers and prospects, you

should also be able to get to know what this very important part of the population (because this part will make your business prosper) read, watch and listen to. Wouldn't it be a shame to find out that from the last Lm5000 spent, only Lm1000 of it was actually hitting the people you want? That is a waste of Lm4000, or seen in another way, you could say that had you invested that amount more effectively, your return could have doubled, tripled or quadrupled. So ask yourself this question: What media are your buyers exposed to? Get hold of existing literature if you can, or create your own research. You can make a small survey with customers who already use your company, try to record your past experiences with which media worked for you and which didn't (and why). Not all research has to cost the world, but it can save you a lot of money in the end. DO NOT make impulsive decisions on how to spend your advertising money. Your decision on how to spend your hard earned money should not be based on how well you like this or that sales representative, or how much of a discount you manage to get. Getting an advert or spot for Lm50 instead of Lm100 may mean you gained Lm50, but it could as easily mean that you just threw Lm50 down the drain.

4. Advertise in the low season, but keep the largest chunk of your budget for the high season.

Although it is a good idea to keep your products and services in people's minds all year round, it is very important that you give it all you've got during the spending season. If people buy on a Friday, then make sure you are there on that day. If your product sells in summer, then put most of your budget in the summer months, because that is where you will be competing for market share. And if you think you will get too busy, think again. Plan for it, and prepare to hire part-time or temporary workers during that time.

5. Produce quality ads.

There seems to be some general feeling among a number of companies that since they have spent a chunk of money on booking advertising space, they seem to feel that they shouldn't waste money on producing quality ads. Their notion is that if they can, they will try to get the ad production for free. To me, this sounds like buying an expensive car but then going cheap on the fuel. Once you are anyway investing good money for the advertising space, invest a fraction more on producing good quality ads I agree that in some cases, especially for television, a good quality spot could set you back a substantial amount.

I agree that in some cases, especially for television, a good quality spot could set you back a substantial amount. But that might not always be true. Find

creative people who can come up with ideas that can be done in simple, inexpensive but ingenious ways. Pay a bit more for these ideas, but save a lot more on expensive production. And then, please keep in mind that a good production that will sell for you can be used again and again for quite a long time, so the actual expense over a stretch of time will become quite acceptable.

6. Test your advertising materials BEFORE you use it.

Just because an ad looks nice does not mean it will sell for you. Present your ad, or a choice of ads, to typical customers and see what they think. This is also very important to do with the message of the ad. Remember, although you are paying for the ad, you are not the one who has to like it: your customers do. So make sure that your advert has the right ingredients that will make your prospective customers react positively to it.

7. Make sure you have a strong message in your advertising.

The header is important, very important. 19 out of 20 people will not read more than the header of your ad. If your ad does not have a strong message, your ad can bring in less than one tenth of what it could bring in. Between a mediocre design with a strong message, and a mediocre message with a wonderful design, choose the one with the strong message.

8. Keep track of where the enquiries are coming from.

Make sure your sales people enquire and keep records of which adverts brought in the customers. This is your passport to your own research – free. By checking with your own customers, you will get valuable information about where to advertise.

Emphasise the importance of this step with your sales people, since this system will ultimately provide you with the right feedback to have better results from your advertising campaign, which will mean more enquiries for your sales people. And if your sales people's salaries are performance-based, it should be easier for them to accept this minor duty.

9. Make sure that your enquiries are turned into sales.

Advertising and other communication tools can be very helpful, but you need the other departments to do their bit as

well. Once you have the enquiries, you need your sales people to make the most of it. Make sure they have all the necessary preparation and support to turn the enquiries that come in from your campaigns into sales. Try to predict the approximate amount of enquiries you will get, to make sure you have the right balance of sales staff. If enquiries are going to be by phone, make sure you have enough phone lines, and enough people to answer them. You can't make a sale if you don't answer the phone, or if you leave prospective customers waiting for 20 minutes in your shop without giving them the required attention. Chances are that the phone enquiry will not phone again, and the prospect that gets fed up waiting will go to your competitor.

10. Find the right agency.

Chances are that you will not be able to take care of all these aspects internally. In most cases

that I have seen, some managers start by believing they can, and end up doing very little marketing. Mostly because they are too busy doing what they are supposed to be doing: their job. So they end up doing things in an impulsive, reactive and haphazard way. Don't sell yourself or your agency too short. You have to decide what you want from your advertising agency, and talk to them about it. If they can't or won't do it, then maybe it's time to find someone who can. But it is important to give this aspect its due importance. Agencies are not there only to book advertising space. Media clerks do that. Most of them have much more to offer, and you should have expectations from your advertising agency. But remember that the expectations have to be realistic, and that nothing in life is free. If you want a good service, you have to accept the undisputable fact that you have to pay for it.