

No Sales No Business

Knowing how to sell is the only way to stay in business

It's real tough to keep a business going without sales. Sales is the fuel and the engine that enables the vehicle to run. Entrepreneurs have been known to successfully create a pent-up sales demand for their product before the business is actually ready to fulfill. But I don't know of any business that has been able to successfully stick around, ready to fulfill, without sales.

Jordache is a great case in point. The owners spent time and money creating a persona for the company. They ran their ads, implanted their image in the consumers' minds and actually had folks going to stores salivating to buy their jeans long before the jeans were delivered - in fact, even before the jeans were mass-produced. The built-up sales demand made for great sales figures once their product hit the shelves. This works quite well, especially in retail, at least for a while. However, the human factor ultimately holds the key to success.

I recently spoke with the CEO of a product manufacturing company. He confessed that when he was involved in the engineering side of his business, before he became the head of his company, everyone in his division used to complain about the sales force. The common problem, at least to them, was that salespeople would say and do almost anything to get a sale. Deadlines, almost impossible designs and promises, were meaningless to the sales force. Getting sales was the goal. Or in his case, somewhat like Jordache, selling a product before it was actually produced. This made those who had to fulfill the promises, designs and deadlines, the engineering department for example, furious.

As luck would have it the need for more salespeople hit a critical point and our friend, who became CEO, took the challenge. Out he went, in his new capacity, as a salesperson.

"What an eye-opener" he confided. "I found myself doing whatever it took to close a sale".

"I started building relationships with my prospects and strengthening those with my existing clients. I realized, that if I didn't get sales there wouldn't be anything for the engineers to complain about because we'd be out of business eventually"!

So what is sales? Positioning? Marketing? Promotions? Advertising? Public Relations?

Obviously, all of the above are part of the mix because they help create the desire for a company's product or service. But ultimately it's the customer/salesperson (or customer service representative) interface that is the most important element in closing the sale.

Think about all the advertising, marketing, public relations and promotion money spent by companies to get people interested in their products. So much of it is great. It gets the

consumer (whether B to C or B to B) ready to buy. Then D-day arrives and the customer meets or speaks with the salesperson.

All that money spent to lure people to your product or service and too often the ball is dropped by the salesperson (or lack thereof). The company forgot to spend money, and/or time training the salesperson on how to sell. Sure companies teach or perhaps show would be the proper terminology, their salespeople about the features and benefits of their product but they forget to train them on the techniques of dealing with people.

You may want to buy those Jordache jeans but if you can't find a sales person to help you or worse, the salesperson's rude or thinks his or her phone conversation is more important than taking care of you. Well "I guess I'll go back and get those Levi's or Guess Jeans" and that's the end of the story.

Relationship building is really what it's all about. Making sure the customer knows you're concerned about their needs. It's amazing when you think about how many companies were built on relationships and how many of them saw their demise when they forgot that their relationship with their customers was what it was all about.

Of course, quality and dependability are also of utmost importance. You can have a great rapport with your customers but if your product or service is lacking, then all the listening, dinners, cards, great delivery times, golf outings and ball games will be for naught. Ford is a perfect example. What caused their current problems? Not keeping up with quality, which included design, and inadequate response time to problems with their SUVs and the tires that they came equipped with to name a few. Ultimately, they breached the trust with their customers and subsequently damaged their relationship with them.

You may have loved the salesperson, you may only buy Fords, but you weren't going to buy that SUV with those tires no matter what he or she told you. So the packaging, positioning, marketing, even the relationships can only take you so far. But if everything is equal you'll always go back to the folks who really took care of you and you trust. It's that old sales axiom, "People buy from people they like". Oh how true.

When you are budgeting time, money and other resources to sell your products and or services make certain that you leave a substantial portion for the education of your sales force, including yourself. And don't fall into the mindset of "As long as they know what the product or service is all about, they should be able to sell it", that's only part of the knowledge needed to be successful.

Sales people must learn how to interact with clients, find their needs, wants, desires, distresses, and they have to show concern for customers, which means a large dose of listening. Customer care brings customer loyalty, something that's hard to come by in this day and age.

I recently purchased an anti-virus program for my computer, shortly after installing it I ran into a problem that needed immediate attention. I called their “customer service” line only to find a maze of options, frustration, a message that directed me to their website for help and that all too common “if you would like to speak with a customer service representative for a fee of \$2.95 per minute, please hit..”.

Customer care, I think not. Will I ever buy from that software manufacturer again? Never, I don't trust them. Would I recommend them to friends or acquaintances? Not if I want to keep or build a relationship with those individuals. Hey, I may want to speak with them about doing business with me someday!

Teach your sales force how to really take care of your customers, set up your company so that it reinforces that philosophy, never get complacent in meeting your customers needs and your customers will help you close the sales to them that you've always wanted.