



Before You Ask “Would You Like to Buy Some...?”

“The Best Way to Get An Order is to Ask for One!”

Asking a customer to buy your product or service is a tough job. Ask any salesperson.

A phone call finally answered. An appointment made. An agenda created. Samples and literature gathered. Demo hardware and software collected (and maybe even some time set aside to practice!). Travel across town or across the country. Meetings that start late. Buyer changes. Buyers with limited openings to buy. Overstocks that must be resolved before new products can be considered. Defectives. Credit problems.

The issues seem endless, but a good sales team can overcome them and achieve their goals. But what should be done before the sales person asks his / her customer to buy some...?

Distribution Plan and Sales Organization Strategy

There are many things a company can do to ensure success for their salespeople, but one in particular is often overlooked. Does the company have a well thought out distribution plan and sales organization strategy?

Companies have prospered by handling their own distribution, having an affiliate label arrangement and by agreeing to a publishing relationship. I have seen sales of a company that sells direct grow dramatically with a change from manufacturer's reps to a direct sales organization. And I have seen the reverse happen too. And sometimes reps and direct people working together provide maximum results.

Sales have increased with reliance on only one or two select distributors to serve the needs of all retailers nationally. And I have seen sales grow with nearly 100% of sales direct to retail. Sales can increase by relying on the mass merchants. Or by relying on specialty stores. Or even direct response via catalogs or television infomercials. Or sometimes an even balance.

Sales in the US can benefit from an aggressive effort internationally, or sometimes it is best to wait to export until the US market is well established.

The Size, Nature and Timing of the Product, the Organization and their Life Cycles

The issue is not which distribution plan or sales organization is best. The issue is that in each case, before the distribution structure was set and the sales organization was hired, trained, directed and given their account list, a core strategy was set in place that was appropriate to the size, nature and timing of the product, the organization and their life cycles.

A start up may benefit from using the established tools of the trade, including commissioned reps and distributors. Each bring credibility to a product while costs are expended only with volume. Reps and wholesalers also frequently minimize the needs for elaborate internal systems, as they often take on many significant tasks for a manufacture or publisher.

A large, established company with a unique market position may benefit from an internal sales organization that can be properly imbued with the company culture and remain focused on the many projects of the company. It may also have invested enough in product and brand marketing to be confident it should seek out the broadest possible distribution, even beyond the obvious specialty and mass merchant accounts.

Very simply, before we send our hardworking sales teams out into the field, it may be worth taking another look at the priorities we have set on sales and distribution goals, and if the current sales organization and its structure will best achieve those priorities.

Then, when we are certain our team is right for our business, lets remember one old but simple rule taught to me by a sales manager many years ago: "The best way to get an order is to ask for one!"



About the Author of this Report

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