

CAN SALES PEOPLE DO LEAD GENERATION?

Ask any salesperson this question and you will very likely be astonished by the answer. Most will tell you that they'd rather be handed results-driven leads so that they can quickly move on to actual selling. That is, of course, not the official line of management these days. My own long experience in working with hundreds of sales and marketing managers tells me that most are now caught in certain "trends" and have become downright naïve about the ROI-value of these trends. Naturally, sales across every sector and demographic are down, with only a handful of lucky winners.

A major defect of these trends is the wrong assumption that lead generation and sales are so closely related that a sales person can accomplish both with a little extra effort. This is rarely, if ever, true about only the top sales talent in any organization, and even then overall sales productivity takes a severe hit. So the real question is: Can salespeople do effective lead generation where they prospect and develop new business simultaneously? Take it from this inside sales rep, outside salesman, business development manager, and lead generation expert, the simple answer is NO.

Lead generation and sales are complex maneuvers requiring deep experience and proper training before one can be expected to produce great results. Yet, because of the wrong assumption mentioned above, brand new recruits, some straight out of college or high school, are expected to generate leads while also selling. This is not only dumb, it is clearly counterproductive, as fresh talent is wasted trying to make unrealistic ideas work. Even veterans don't fare much better. Juggling tasks in a single job is difficult by itself, but what many salespeople are now being asked to do is juggle tasks in at least two distinct jobs.

Managers would benefit from remembering the distinct definitions of sales and business development/lead generation. Sales has for sure come a long way from its hardcore, slam-dunk philosophy to the more soft, consultative selling approach, and this is a very positive development. But what has not gone away (and can never be done away with) is the all-important *close*. Without diving too deeply into the issue of the *close*, which is another subject to address, it can be pointed out that the *close* is being actively disengaged from the very definition of sales for really no logical reason. At the same time, the definition of a business development rep/lead generator is being steered to that of a professional generating such finely tuned leads that sales occur as a mere side effect, the inevitable result of a perfectly calibrated "automation" process. It is easy to see why so many are now confusing sales with business development. The salesperson is the lead generator and the lead generator is the salesperson. Except that these unnecessarily convoluted definitions cannot deliver—in fact, are not delivering—sales results.

Business managers and executives alike must realign their sales and marketing strategies by realizing that sales and business development are best kept separated and performed as two independent positions, much like marketing and sales. Lately we as marketers have been led to believe that a simple ideological combination of the two positions, without its worth being substantially proven, will somehow bring in a new era of sales growth. While it is true that more and more B2B buyers are watching videos and combing through web searches to research a product or service, buyers still need to be directly engaged.

So, it is not enough to setup various sales and marketing channels and sit back; proactive engagement of the buyer remains indispensable. A well-trained, proven lead generation expert is precisely the kind of individual who can work with serious focus on producing results-driven, real opportunities. Such an individual is bound to produce great results because their work would be relevant horizontally (across all the proper channels) and vertically (capturing opportunities in various stages of development). How many of us have hurriedly closed on an opportunity only to find later that we basically left more of the sale on the table? I was forced into similar situations myself as a salesman and have seen this happen too many times to others. By default, the salesperson is geared toward making the sale and not thinking about the size of the opportunity. On the other hand, the right lead generation expert will realize the size of an opportunity and capture it at just the right time by documenting it properly for sales or marketing.

It's time for business managers to get back to basics and strategize to achieve results that can be taken to the bank, not just activity masking as "results". Because at the end of the day, it is only the bankable results that keep you in business.

Jameel Saqib

Co-Founder, McCord Solutions – September 4, 2014