

Launching a Sales Growth Initiative

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Sales performance is an essential element to every organisation. Companies need to ensure that performance is maintained at levels required to deliver results. However, the burning question is – how does management know when a sales team needs additional impetus with regards to targets and goal achievement? Finding the origin of a problem such as this is difficult for top management, especially those in SMEs where sales and marketing responsibilities are consolidated under one umbrella. The problem persists in larger organisations, where there are so many employees involved in processes that it is almost impossible to track down exactly where breakdowns emanate from. Poor sales performance is often attributed to product, promotional budget, market research, price positioning, competitive reaction, consumer favor, lack of trade incentive or poor exposure, but it could simply be caused by poor sales execution at the customer level.

The Root of the Problem

The source could be one of 2 things – either product / market related or performance related, for example, the lack of execution from the sales team at customer interface. So how does one begin to unravel the layers to figure out what the issues are and what needs to change in order to reverse a negative trend?

- The best place to start – with your customers
- The best subject to tackle first – the value that your product or service delivers
- The best action step – conduct a market audit to verify market conditions
- The best report – how well equipped are your sales teams to meet the challenges set by the marketplace

Customers

The most viable way to gauge success is through your customers. Your customers will be the best people to provide you with a detailed and unbiased view of your organization or product when it comes to delivering the value expected. It may be helpful to revisit some of the product / market assumptions that were made at the product's inception to measure the alignment of these assumptions with the current customer reality.

A customer satisfaction survey can be extremely useful to interrogate a large number of customers with various demographics, whilst taking any potential bias out of the system. These surveys will ensure that the correct information is being relayed to decision making level and that all issues are addressed, including broader areas such as product design, use, satisfaction, cost benefit performance, reliability and preferences.

The benefit of using a customer satisfaction survey to uncover crucial information is that a lot of detail can be obtained from a simple and efficient technique. If the surveys show that the product succeeds in satisfying particular needs and there is sufficient market interest, it would then be necessary to look at market dynamics

The Market

Reverting to the original market assumptions will enable you to create the right base line for conducting a current state of the market audit. A resourceful approach could include the following:

- Confirm relevant target market
- Verify competitive and pricing landscape
- Define what approaches were used with regards to segmentation, targeting and positioning
- Highlight changes from original assumptions to current reality
- Identify significant gaps that may be affecting sales

There is a plethora of tools that can be put in place to conduct the audit, including positioning grids, market mapping and segmentation interrogation. Whatever technique you use, ensure that your market audit elicits an answer of whether market constraints are at the cause of sales issues.

Sales

Careful questioning needs to take place when it comes to your sales organisation. Often, sales issues are caused by miscommunication between sales employees and customers, in which case, adequate training needs to be conducted with all sales staff. However, there may be other questions that you need to ask:

- Do you employ sufficient sales people?
- Have you assigned clear sales targets?
- Do you have a clearly defined acquisition (retention & penetration) process?
- Do you hire the right kind of people?
- Do you invest sufficiently in skills and product training?



Making the Move

Once you have a three dimensional view of the potential sales inhibitors – customer (product), market dynamics and sales – you will then be able to analyse the information and conclude which aspects are impacting performance. Annual reviews can save time and energy as they will enable you to figure out what could be affecting sales performance prior to the manifestation of a problem. Furthermore, a standard annual ‘overhaul’ could be conducive to make certain that all critical delivery mechanisms are in place and functioning. Making a move proactively, before a crisis will ensure that your organisation is constantly growing in the right ways and maintaining a high level of performance and productivity.

About Carpedia Consulting...

Carpedia Consulting is an internationally relevant management consultancy firm, dedicated to assisting clients to improve sales and profits through the implementation of improvement programs. Our approach is what makes us unique. The way we design, develop and execute our programs is hands-on, solutions-based and excellence driven.

Our programs are customized to the needs of your organisation and are designed to ensure significant and sustainable improvements are made both internally and externally – by the sales team, for the customer.

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