

Don't let devices get in way of personal service

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In any economy, the sales function is critical to success and profitability. It is the lifeline of the company and the means by which products are sold and revenues generated.

It sounds simple, but in today's fast-paced environment, electronic communication devices can actually hinder the goal of increasing sales and retaining key customers.

In an effort to increase more time with customers and make sales reps more productive, companies are providing a sales support team or a sales assistant. These individuals perform all administrative duties to include managing calendars, responding to time-sensitive e-mail, qualifying business leads, setting appointments, tracking sales and researching company information.

Another advantage for sales support is to enhance the overall working relationship with your customers. While the sales rep is on the phone or out of the office, the sales assistant is able to provide immediate customer response.

You might suggest the calls go to voice mail. However, by transferring calls to an assistant, the customer gains immediate attention and avoids telephone tag. Outstanding customer service is still the best way to earn a company's business and retain it.

To build relationships, sales reps need more one-on-one time with a customer. In fact, one large local company realized this and no longer permits electronic communication devices to be used to conduct any business with a customer. The company's sales policy is either in person or over the phone.

Another example of tapping into sales support is a local, national insurance company that was determined to grow market share. They wanted to create a program that would increase the time their insurance representatives spent with customers. This was accomplished by hiring temporary employees with strong sales and customer service experience to set advanced appointments for their new agents. This concept was so successful it is now implemented several times a year and adopted nationally by their corporate office.

Are your sales reps tied to their electronic communication devices? Have you personally experienced the following? The cell phone vibrates during a sales call; the sales rep glances at the incoming call and smiles with a quick apology, or requests a moment to step out of your meeting to take an urgent call. This is a distraction and a lack of common courtesy; however, it is now becoming way too common. We forget that our most important customer is the one seated before us.

Sales reps are overwhelmed by managing the inflow of daily communications 24/7. A company benefits by building a strong sales support team. This allows sales reps more time with clients to secure orders and increase sales, increase overall productivity, drive growth and stay ahead of the competition.

Everyone in a sales role must remember that electronic communication devices can impair the very relationships you are trying to build with your customers. Set a goal that your sales reps will spend 90 percent of their time with customers, either in person or over the phone, and watch your revenues grow.

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