

# Reinvent yourself

How innovation is your strongest point of differentiation

It's no big trade secret that, in order to make an impact with potential customers, you must take on a unique approach to selling your products and services. But do today's sales representatives place enough emphasis on differentiation?

"Sales representatives today, particularly veterans, are far too conditioned in their sales processes and need to get out of their comfort zones — instead of being proactive, they are being reactive," says Vaughn Moore, vice president of sales and marketing for AIT Worldwide Logistics. "The sales reps who make it a point to be different every day are the ones who are successful. Being in sales is about the joy of accomplishment, but you have to be willing to take chances in order to distinguish yourself in the face of competitors."

*Smart Business* talked with Vaughn Moore to find out how using effective points of differentiation creates a competitive edge with customers.

**The first step in differentiating yourself is by taking on a unique approach with customers. Where do you begin this process?**

This objective cannot be achieved until you open yourself up to innovation. Change what you are doing, vary your sales style, and modify your approach with customers.

Take an honest self-assessment to make sure you are evolving in that area of change. If you are not willing to reinvent yourself or be open to change management, then you are severely limiting your growth potential. Once you have identified that change, it's absolutely imperative for sales people to embrace it and become truly vested in it. Adapting to change empowers sales representatives to differentiate and position themselves for success.

Often, differentiation from your competition comes from less traditional avenues than products and services offered — today, more so than ever, it is important for companies to maintain commitments to the community. Don't be afraid to share your company's charity involvement with customers to offer as a point of distinction. Take further action and involve your customer base in those events. Ultimately, this



**Vaughn Moore**

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participation further enhances business relationships.

**What are some examples of pitfalls encountered when attempting to differentiate?**

The most common mistake I see occurs when sales reps fail in proving the company's points of differentiation to the customer. Let's face it, superior customer service and on-time percentages don't mean anything unless you can offer something more than just 'lip service.' It is the sales representative's responsibility to present points of differentiation to the customer in a way that's captivating, interesting and memorable.

When you maintain proper conviction in your company's points of differentiation, people will listen. When I say conviction, I am referring to a deeply rooted belief rather than merely selling customers on an idea or vision. It's not just about putting forth the finite time and resources to secure business; it's about going that extra mile to set yourself apart. It's the most powerful way of connecting with and mak-

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ing a case for the customer. Sales representatives who are strong in their convictions set a positive example for customers, and create a relationship with them that inspires rather than frustrates.

**Aside from products and services, what are other innovative ways to differentiate in the marketplace?**

Take a close look at how you build your sales story — you will be surprised to discover how a unique hook or pitch can differentiate a somewhat 'common' product or service.

Furthermore, ensure that you have done your 'homework' on the company before the call takes place — investigate the Web site, study the brochure, read the press releases and examine all marketing collateral. Use the knowledge gained during these 'crash courses' as points of differentiation.

**What is the link between differentiation and marketing?**

They are synonymous with each other. If there's not a thread connecting them then you aren't capitalizing on your marketing incentives. To successfully communicate your company's marketing plan, each aspect — from print advertising and online visibility to sales collateral and internal communication — must begin by defining specific objectives and applying them into an integrated message. Establishing this foundation is absolutely critical. Without a cohesive and integrated message, the organization's points of differentiation are lost, muddled or virtually eliminated.

This point is especially important to consider when your company is not a household name. Marketing is not about how many images to include in the advertisement, sentences to post on the Web site, or slides to include in the PowerPoint presentation; it's about communicating one compelling message. That message is your point of differentiation in sales. <<

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