

Why Trade Associations Need To Be In The Business Of Selling!

Some of the questions below you might already be asking yourself and each one may lead you to the same conclusion. We have not positioned ourselves for growth and we need to reengineer in order to sell our value.

Do you rely heavily on corporate sponsors/non-dues revenue? Do you continually worry about your value proposition due to the number of shrinking membership? Is your tradeshow or convention stagnant in both energy and profitability? Does your web site generate significant revenue for your business? Do your publications attract the right level of advertising dollars? Are you marketing only to retain and/or bring in new members or do you have a sales process? Does your association management team know the difference between sales and marketing; and, how closely are the activities aligned, if at all?

“Know the difference between sales & marketing”

Many trade associations do a wonderful job with communication and others seem to have a good handle on how to market internally. Often, budgets dictate how much you can do as well as the quality of the resources available to manage those key functions. However, where most associations fail is in specific sales and marketing initiatives that are the core of an association’s long-term viability. Many organizations have little or no sales force in place.

“Develop a sales process and hire qualified sales people”

The first thing an association needs to do is to evaluate their current marketing plan. This should include a full SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis. Following your analysis, you need to create a sales plan. The process needs to be created that aligns both the marketing and sales functions. In each area of revenue generation there must be a focused sales and marketing plan/process with one skilled person responsible for carrying out the plan. Goals need to be established and deadlines set. Your team needs to be rewarded for success as well as held accountable for failure.

“Create incentives for success and remove deadwood”

If you don’t have a solid, fresh and active prospect database in your core area of revenue generation – you need one. This doesn’t mean the purchase of a huge database. On the contrary, your sales force should focus on quality leads.

“Quality not quantity – build the pipeline”

You should be able to clearly communicate your value proposition. Establish your prospective client's need and insure the prospect knows how you intend to meet their needs.

“One size does not fit all”

Develop a relationship, exceed expectations, follow through and continually manage the customer experience. Never take the customer for granted. Equally as important, never assume that a member or sponsor will continue their support forever. This industry can be very competitive; and so we must evaluate, reengineer and develop deeper relationships with multiple layers in the customer’s organization.

“Selling is a process. Develop a successful sales process and replicate”

Evaluate your profit center and plan for success. Insure you have a focused sales process that can be executed smoothly without disruption. Consider hiring sales people, conduct sales training and provide an incentive for success. Whether you decide to make drastic changes or not, you should continually review your goals, and hold people ACCOUNTABLE for their responsibilities.

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SWOT - Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities & threats