

Cultivating a Selling Style

Have you ever thought about your selling style and where it comes from? You know, the people, their effort, their drive, their motivation and your investment? It is probably the single-most important ingredient to your company's success. Sure, without great products, capable employees and your own sweat equity your business would not succeed, but your selling style is the key. It defines your company's competitive edge.

It is a well-documented tale that most business for residential electronic systems contractors is referral-based. That alone proves that sales relationships and the end results of your installed systems develop future business. The brand is you. Your company's selling style is defined by the personality that your business presents and how well this personality creates new sales through your existing customers' experiences.

So, just how do you determine how good your selling style is? Like many daily aspects of your business, there is no single way to

determine this. To start with, there is sales revenue. How much did your company sell so far this year? How much did you grow over last year? What was your growth over the past few years?

The measure of success in sales revenue is simply to increase your revenue at a greater rate than your cost of running the business. This is ideal as it means you can continuously re-invest a greater amount of money in your busi-

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ness. And, with such results over time, when there comes a time that the market just doesn't allow you to grow or, in a best case situation, you are ready to invest in your firm to fuel growth, you will have the reserves to do so. Taking a healthy balance sheet to the bank is a beautiful thing and is not possible without many things, including an effective selling style.

Measuring your selling style effectiveness also can be deter-

mined by the attitude of your sales people. If you find them to be organized, disciplined, communicating with their co-workers and coming to you with more progress than issues, then your selling style is in pretty darn good shape.

What to do then? This style won't just sustain itself. It did not magically happen. You and your people made it happen and make it happen consistently. Even when things are good, you should work on your business, not just in it.

You have to get away from the norm to make things better. It allows you to more easily separate from daily distractions to focus on reinforcing your selling style. Schedule an offsite meeting. This doesn't have to be far away or costly. Just make it a stimulating environment.

Planning your first off-site selling style “retreat” should involve, obviously, your entire sales staff. It should also include several other employees, starting with those who are most likely to have customer interaction. If you can spare the people and the time, it probably wouldn't be bad to have everyone at the retreat.

Let's assume that it is you as the owner, two sales people, a project manager, a systems designer, the office manager/receptionist and two installation technicians. All of these folks have customer contact and can define and influence your selling style.

Kick off the meeting by letting your sales team know that you are proud of the business and everyone's effort. Tell them that you want to come away from the day with everyone's agreement on what the ingredients for your good selling style are and ways to en-



sure that you keep doing these things. Ask your team the following questions: What's at risk? How do we minimize that risk? What's easily overlooked and how can we avoid doing so? When we do screw up, what (not who) usually causes it? How do we fix this? What do you (each of the employees) most want to do more of to maintain a great selling style? What new things could we do based on observations of our customer that would make us even better?

By then end of the day, the meeting should result in tons of more ideas and inspiration from your employees than from you. All you have to do is inspire them to think together and think positively.

Set up a whole day offsite. A nice location is important; lots of natural light indoors or out is motivating. Don't have a party the night before; be alert in the morn-
continued on page 95

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Repeatability

continued from page 40

before we have to, by using some non-intuitive lessons from the world of manufacturing. The next article is called, "It All Needs to Flow", followed by, "The Evils of Inventory", "The Waste of the Pack Rat" and the "Change Control Conundrum."

Let this introductory article leave you with the thought that we are, in fact, production companies. We design and build things that provide value. We produce systems to please our clients, even though each one may be unique. We want to be assured of this quality result for each and every one of our "products" even if we produce only one of each. We want to know that the desired result is repeatable. That's exactly what manufacturing is all about, too.

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Inside Sales

continued from page 44

ing. Have an agenda but keep it light with lots of discussion time. Push hard for new thinking and morning working sessions. Take a 20-minute walk or hike when your morning session ends. Have lunch together. Make it a high-protein lunch, not too heavy on the post-lunch nap-inducing fare. Have the lunch start no later than noontime. Take another walk or hike around the facility after lunch. Get back to work by turning the meeting fully over to one or two of your employees. Show them that while you may be the owner, the decisions and style of the sales process (and other areas, too) are a shared

effort. Help them run a really good afternoon meeting. Take notes. Make sure you have been using poster pads and an easel or an electronic whiteboard to capture the ideas and actions. When the afternoon fade starts to arrive, as it always does, don't let it get too far. As soon as you sense some folks are zoning out, take a break. Espresso, Red Bull or whatever perks everyone up plus a few minutes out of the meeting room is in order.

When the end of the day nears, make sure that the agenda called for a wrap-up session. Review the notes together. Prioritize certain things. Go back and challenge a few. Determine what is going to be done and who will do them to make your company better.

Then, go have some fun. Enjoy happy hour, dinner, free time for a workout or head to a club for some live music. You have all earned it and did some great work together.

The follow-up from such an event is vital. Someone has to type up those notes. Get it done the first business day back. Send everyone the notes and schedule a brief meeting to review them and help everyone to do at least one thing they thought of. If you can implement more, then it's even better. But start with achievable actions. Remember that this is about improving your selling style through your people. So let them spend most of their time selling. Selling is always in style.

Wires

continued from page 50

but don't presume that it is always going to be an iPod. The good news is that the 3.5mm plug is somewhat universal in getting the audio out of these devices, but there is no universal standard for the connections to docks and chargers. Inquire with the manufacturer of the products to be used, and then be certain to make your clients aware that as they

switch and upgrade from one type of portable player to another, even within the iPod world, the connections may change. The point of contact with a client over something as small as that is a great way to maintain visibility for upgrade business.

Keeping things connected is where many in the custom business got their start, typically when working at a traditional retailer that didn't have a means to assist customers in linking together the products they had just purchased. From those small one-person businesses, our industry has blossomed, but even in the wireless world the use of interconnects is always at the core. Whether it is the complex digital world of DVI and HDMI, or the deceptively not-so-simple task of figuring out how to connect a portable player to a large system, knowing which connection to use will keep you wired for business.

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Grimani

continued from page 52

with resolution and contrast that will knock your socks off.

Esthetics. Decorate the room to make it into a real entertainment event. The cinematic transport process starts even before the lights dim. Also, you can use the darker and neutral tones required for adequate projection systems. Integrate treatments into the décor disguise them away. You can even hide away all the gear that may distract your conscious mind from its virtual reality trip.

Seating. You can use purpose-made theater seating. Ever tried to sit up in a living room couch for two hours while watching a movie? Not possible. Your body will ache; that's a given. Theater chairs are ergonomically designed for proper support so

that your 120 minutes are as comfy as possible. That helps the virtual reality thing, you know?

Background noise control. A dedicated space can be made into a quiet area with no background noise. That allows the system to shine through and to resolve the 120dB of dynamic range available in Dolby Digital and DTS soundtracks. You can even turn the volume down a bit without losing any lines of dialog or critical sound effects in case your ears are a tad "sensitive."

Justifies high-end gear. A properly designed and engineered dedicated room can fully showcase the performance values of high-quality equipment. The picture quality is at its full contrast ratios. The audio system can exhibit its full dynamic range. The fine subtlety of carefully crafted cinematography and sound design come through just as the director intended, allowing you to really believe in the story line.

Enhanced property value. A dedicated theater space is often a key selling feature in an upscale residence. Everyone has swimming pools. Everyone has game rooms. But few home sellers have a dedicated, themed theater space. Prospective homebuyers (and their kids) are sure to remember the house with the theater. That puts the seller at a negotiating advantage compared to other properties in the neighborhood, and I am seeing more and more real estate agents cite theaters as a feature in their listings.

Boy, with arguments like these who would ever want to outfit a great room with a home theater system? A dedicated space is the obvious path to movie nirvana. Of course this all assumes that your client shares your passion for movies, or that you can infect them with yours. Bring them to your showroom or another customer's dedicated room and watch them be amazed. For many clients, that's all it takes.