

Does your sales machine whimper or roar?

By Paul Chapman



“Successful businesses don’t rely on a few talented individuals. They understand very clearly which customers will buy their product and why.”

Some companies consistently achieve year-on-year sales growth while others always experience feast or famine. The difference between outstanding performance and mediocrity is within the grasp of any company. Paul Chapman discusses how...

A small print company in London has sales staff who win twice as much business per salesperson as their competitors. A global software company was able to increase the average sales person’s target from £500k to £1.4m in 4 years.

While these companies operated in very different business sectors and geographies they both identified the same key issue –

sales success needed to be consistent and replicable, and that had to be a board responsibility.

Do you need a ‘Sales Machine’?

Successful businesses don’t rely on a few talented individuals. They understand very clearly which customers will buy their product and why.

The challenge is to capture this and implement a process across the company that creates a key competitive advantage – a ‘Sales Machine’. This process will be repeatable, predictable and can be replicated in different offices, market sectors or geographies. Once the machine is in place, significant sales growth will follow.

The problem is common. There are many ways of selling products or services. Often it is based on the enthusiasm and expertise of the owner. Or, it can be driven by the character, skills and hard work of a skilled salesperson. In many cases it can be based on a mixture of a good product, hard work, and a generous slice of luck.

The down side, in all of these cases, is that businesses like this are unlikely to consistently produce good results – there will be good years and bad, and

eventually they will reach a plateau and find it hard to grow and run the risk of sales stagnation.

The solution is the ‘sales machine’.

Selling is a bit like making products on a production line. If you ensure that the right components are fed in, at the right time, at the right place and the right actions are carried out - to the right quality - then products come off the end of the line in the volume you need. It is the same with selling – but the ‘products’ are sales orders.

There are just five elements in a good sales machine clear strategy, replicable process, credible execution, careful monitoring and board ownership.

You need a clear strategy

The first element is a clear strategy. This must come from the board and is a clear statement of what we are going to do, why, the goals we must achieve and the resources that we will invest. These then have to be communicated effectively to all of the company.



You need a replicable process

The second element is a clear, and replicable, process. This needs to provide answers to just four questions that a buyer will have in his or her mind:

- Why do I really need this product - what compelling reason is there to buy it?
- Will it justify the investment?
- Why do I need it now – rather than next month or next year?
- Why should I buy it from you – rather than your competitors?

Additionally, the process has to take into account how prospects buy your products. A sales process for an expensive piece of plant will be very different from one used to sell temporary secretarial staff – but a process must be there!

This is where good sales organisations ‘roar’ and others ‘whimper’, but getting there isn’t easy. Getting this right is critical and most companies need help.

You need credible execution

The third element is execution. Sales managers, and sales people, need to have a credible plan – and it needs to be written down! If they can’t write down who they will sell to, when, where, how they will measure it, the resources they need, the risks and how they will contain them, then it probably won’t be successful!

They also need the right environment, skills, support motivation and tools. In a good company ‘everybody sells’ or at least has an awareness of the importance of selling, and the plan should cover all the relevant departments and staff that impact on the sales performance.

You need careful monitoring

The fourth element is monitoring. Any plan needs to be carefully monitored – and action taken quickly to correct things (or people) that don’t work as well as they should. The most common reason for failing to achieve sales targets is failure to act in time!

You need board ownership

The fifth element is ownership. This is critical. There must be a board director who is responsible for sales. It is too important to be delegated.

Final thoughts...

Developing and implementing a good sales machine isn’t easy – but the rewards, when you do it well, are substantial as the print and software companies described above confirm. As a director of a business you really do have a choice – to roar or to whimper?

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About the Author

Paul Chapman had over 20 years’ experience of marketing, sales and general management in the UK, Europe, USA and the Far East in both blue chip and early stage companies. He held managing director and marketing / sales director positions in 3 very high growth companies. He has experienced an IPO on NASDAQ, is a member of the Institute of Directors, and has been a company mentor with the Universities of Southampton and Surrey. He joined the Azure Partners board in 2004.

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