

Make it a Happy New Year now

As the holiday season approaches, sales professionals run the risk of scheduling another unexpected holiday in February or March, depending on the length of their sales cycle. Sadly, this income holiday is easily preventable with a little planning.

Let me explain, even under the best of circumstances, prospecting is something sales professionals hate to do, even more so if it involves cold calling. Let's face it, sales people view cold calling as a punishment to be avoided. As a result, we find any number of excuses to avoid this torture, some truly creative. During the holidays, there are a range of seasonal excuses to add to the ordinary. If you add the office, client and family parties, prospecting becomes just too easy to neglect and avoid.

When February rolls around, the hang over hits where it hurts: in the commission. Say you have a ten week sale cycle; meet a prospect for the first time on November 1st, it will close January 10th next year. Assuming you get your commission monthly, you'll get paid out February 2005. If you meet a client November 24th, it will close February 2nd, payout March 1st; and so on.

Most sales professionals give in to the holiday spirit sometime around mid-November. There are a number of reasons for this. With many companies having a December 31st year end, there is a big push on "closing" business now. And in many instances, the lack of prospecting that results from this is condoned and overlooked by sales management, because after all, "everyone is out closing business".

With prospecting slowing down through the latter part of November, and almost completely forgotten in December, sales people seem busy, managers seem happy as business is closing, but what happens after December 31st, when the parties are over? Well in most cases the first week of January still allows for a hang-over, but then there is nothing you can do to avoid the commission drought if you have a ten week sales cycle. Even if you can accelerate to eight weeks, you're not going to see a close until March and a payout till February. What's worse is the cycle perpetuates itself, since in March your manager is going to want some closes to make the quarter. Yes, you know it, no prospecting in March...., next thing you know its June and....

Then there is the common belief (among common sales people) that people don't want to see anyone this time of year: "you just can't get people to see you in December; they'll just push you off to next year". The truth is that it's exactly this type of thinking that leaves an opening for those who stick with the process regardless of the time of year, regardless of what the crowd is doing.

I have found that December is a great time to see prospects for a number of reasons. One is that there are less sales people calling on them and they are willing, almost curious to see a sales person who professionally cold calls them that time of year. With their own activities winding down or focus on a strong year end, and planning for the year to come, they are willing to take the time to listen to ideas and offerings that aid their endeavours. Often what you sell will be needed by them in the New Year, and with the lead time for implementation, the decision needs to be made in November-December to have impact right from the start of the year. And if they don't have



surplus budget now, it's close enough to the new fiscal year (and delivery) that terms could work for them and you to seal the deal now.

The reality is if you ask most sales people it's never a good time to prospect, Mondays are bad, March break, summer vacations, and right back to Christmas. But if you talk to great sales people, they always prospect, every day, every month, every season, because they know they have to. If they don't replenish their prospects, they'll be nothing to close at the end of the cycle. So don't let the holidays delay your efforts and you won't have to deal with the delayed consequences.

For more information on helping your team sell better, write to: info@sellbetter.ca visit <http://www.sellbetter.ca> or call 416 671-3555.

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