

About the Author

Carl Davidson is president of Sales & Management Solutions, which provides sales and management training designed exclusively for the water equipment industry. For more than 13 years, he has helped more than 1,400 companies in seven countries. For a free demonstration tape and catalog, contact the company at 800-941-0068; www.salesco.net.



By Carl Davidson

CAN TECHNOLOGY HELP YOU SELL MORE? *Part 2*

Last month, I discussed a few ideas on tossing your selling techniques into the new century by utilizing available technologies. This month lists a few more selling ideas that have proved themselves worthy of a salesman's efforts.

Palm Pilots, Calendars

Technology has improved the way we contact and find customers. You definitely should be using it to your advantage. Programs such as Act! (by Symantic), Outlook (by Microsoft), Goldmine and several others allow you to easily keep track of prospects, automatically send letters, schedule follow up appointments, etc. It's automatic and it gives your company a major boost in the eyes of your customers. When a customer calls, you automatically can see every call your company has made to them, which equipment they own and even which service calls have been made. I purchased an RO two years ago and the company said it would come out and change my filters every six months. They never have come back, and that has cost them customer loyalty. If a client told you he might buy an RO in six months, would you remember to call them then?

These programs not only keep your staff on top of leads and follow ups, they automatically produce reports on what every salesperson did to contact customers, demo products and follow up. You simply cannot effectively manage a sales force without these tools. The programs are so easy to use even a computer illiterate (no insult intended) who cannot type can use these with ease.

Almost all functions can be done without typing more than a letter or two. Look into these and other programs that will help your team sell more.

Competitor Research

It used to be hard to compare your products, prices and warranties to your competitors, but not anymore. Simply key in the products you compete against into your browser's search engine and you will see hundreds of websites full of information you can download into your computer or print on paper. This information is invaluable. Let's say tonight you are in a home and the couple says they want to shop Brand X. You can show them the pertinent information right from the Brand X website. It's much more believable than just telling them about Brand X and it makes sure you are giving accurate and timely information. Get in the habit of regularly updating your competitor info.

Water-Related News

Log on to websites such as www.yahoo.com, www.cnn.com, www.altavista.com and many others. You will find that these sites offer news customized to your needs. That means you can ask them to pull any stories they find with certain key words—something newspapers cannot do. I have selected such things as "water," "pollution," "softener" and others. At no charge, these news portals will comb every newspaper in the country and show you articles that contain your key words. You don't have to read them all but it is a quick way to stay on top of the industry. Visiting WaterInfoCenter.com also is another way to read timely news dedicated

specifically to the water industry. In addition, you can search sites such as the New England Journal of Medicine and The Mayo Clinic for the latest articles on how water affects your customers. This is the kind of current, accurate information that elevates us from interruptions to welcome guests in customers' homes.

Electronically Finding Neighbors

There are several companies who put out CD-ROMs you can easily purchase that contain every name, address and phone number in the United States and Canada. You can find these online at sites such as www.infousa.com, and you can purchase the CDs in any software store. What's so great about that? You can search by address as well as names. That means when you sell Mr. Brown at 123 Main Street, you can look up his 20 nearest neighbors and contact them. You don't have to ask for neighborhood referrals, you already have them for an investment of less than \$250. This technique is so successful in prospecting, some of my clients even call or write neighbors of people they are doing service calls for and offer a free water test "while a technician is in the area." You can't afford not to use this technique. It is an inexpensive and easy way to call or write great prospects.

Finding New Homeowners

There are several companies that can find new homeowners in your area. These hot prospects are in demand and the quicker you can get them the better. Some service companies will e-mail you daily the freshest information; competition is making monthly lists less effective. Do some research and find the best

companies in this field and consider daily e-mail updates.

Prospecting Via E-Mail

The latest development in prospecting is the use of consumer e-mail. Our company is a pioneer in the field. You can now obtain e-mail addresses of thousands of consumers in your market area and send them a message asking if they are interested in water improvement. You follow up only the ones that are interested, so it is a lot easier than telemarketing and a lot less expensive. Our company charges \$0.03 to find the addresses, send the messages and send you the addresses of people who asked for more information. There is no faster, more efficient and more consistent way to find a steady stream of prospects. Caller ID and other factors have made telemarketing less effective for many dealers. Experts predict that by 2004, 40 percent of all Americans will have e-mail addresses, so if you aren't using this method of prospecting, you are being left behind.

These are just a few examples of the rapid way the world of business and the world of sales is changing. Those of us who try to remember who to follow up with using our memory or who only use letters or phone calls to prospect may be left in the dust as the revolution continues. Embrace technological change. You can learn it and profit from it. There are hundreds of books available on every possible use of the computer related to sales and business. The revolution is upon us. To make your fortune, dig in and hold on. **WQP**

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