

Control the Info Flow

By Colleen Francis

Once upon a time – and not long ago – we in the sales world had firm control of what we wanted buyers to see. They were given access to information about our products when and how we chose to provide it to them. It was meetings, phone calls, websites, brochures and tradeshow. As a result, this put us in control of the sales cycle.

Today, this flow of information has rapidly changed. Now buyers can hop online with smartphones and tablets anytime and anywhere they want to find out about our products. They can quickly comparison shop, and they can access information that wasn't even created by us, or worse information we don't want them to see!.

Having easy access to all this information is great, on the one hand, because it can help educate the buyer. On the other hand, it can overload them with third-party information – sometimes outdated or poor – and add confusion to the decision-making process. Closing the deal then becomes complicated.

Given that huge ocean of online information is only growing, what's the solution? How can we ensure successful sales for the future? I recommend this: Regain control of the information flow. Step up your presence by using a multitude of prospecting techniques both on- and offline, distributing the information you want buyers to see.

Think about it. If your own content doesn't pop up when a consumer searches the web for you, they'll make assumptions based on what someone else says. And if you don't attend tradeshow and networking events, you miss the chance to provide buyers with your best information, land referrals and put a face to your online identity when people look for you.

The whole point of regaining control of the information flow is to attract buyers. Follow your ideal clientele on social media and join the same networking groups they're members of to make yourself known. Publish high value content to these sites daily. In doing so you are casting a wide net and encouraging the buyer to come to you. I call this approach indirect prospecting.

Draw clientele with the right info

Unlike direct prospecting, where you make cold calls with the express purpose of setting up meetings, indirect prospecting is about being everywhere so buyers can find you. In my book, *Nonstop Sales Boom*, I talk about how leaders have to equip sales teams to be the publishers of information. Indirect prospecting includes releasing case studies, testimonials and articles as well as attending networking events to attract buyers with evidence of your company's success. Also, using digital media to share opinions, to post on blogs, Facebook and Twitter, and to write or comment on web articles. Provide enough compelling information that buyers want to do business with you.

PetMeds is a great example of indirect prospecting with its 8.5 percent growth each year. The company saw a trend of web searches for pet illnesses – and ways owners could purchase regular medication refills. PetMeds went on to create its 1-800-PetMeds interactive website and grew a

strong online presence through a blog, articles and social media – as well as offline through TV commercials, ad campaigns and tradeshow.

Schedule for success

Now you might be saying to yourself, “I’m already so busy. How can I possibly find time to mess around with social media and get out to networking events?” Indirect prospecting is actually quite easy to build into your weekly schedule. And, in the long run, it will draw increased clientele as well as allow you to close deals faster and more efficiently because you’ll be attracting a higher percentage of your ideal buyers.

Here’s a breakdown of your weekly investment toward indirect prospecting:

Indirect Attraction Activities	Hours per Week
Network with one association once per day by phone.	2
Attend a networking event or association meeting once per week.	3
Write an article for your blog, newsletter or association trade journal.	2
Publish tips and ask questions on social media.	1
Monitor group activity on LinkedIn or association forums.	1
Research your target list to refine your “attraction” approach.	1
Develop alliance, referral or reseller partners outside of your client network.	2.5
Participate in online forums where your target markets are members.	1
Research tradeshow to attend for promotion.	1
Follow your target contacts and leads on Twitter to listen to their news and see if any issues arise you can leverage in a conversation.	1

If you establish a weekly routine with these indirect prospecting activities, you’ll see a higher volume of buyer response more quickly than if you are only using direct prospecting tactics. Having such a multitude of approaches – not just the traditional phone and e-mail method aimed at individual clients – will make it easier for your target market to find you wherever you go. And, despite the vast ocean of information out there, you’ll be in control of your own information flow.