

## It's a recession — now what can a sales organization do?

Denver Business Journal - by [Colleen Stanley](#)

Can you stand one more article or headline about the recession? Some of the smartest people and companies in the world are challenged right now. If you're frustrated, you have a lot of company.

So what's a sales organization to do during these economic times? The first decision is to quit accepting average. In the words of Jim Collins, author of "Good to Great," good is the enemy of great. Average performance is often accepted by owners and sales managers during good economic times. Money is rolling in, cash flow is good and average sales performance is acceptable.

Bad economic times are a wake-up call to bad salespeople, practices and habits. Here are three things to examine in your sales strategy to ensure greatness:

**1. Recognize the difference between budget cuts and revenue cuts:** Companies cancel sales meetings and trainings because it is an easy number to identify and cut on the budget. Numbers not easily identified on a profit-and-loss statement are lost opportunities from unskilled, untrained and discouraged salespeople.

Wouldn't it be interesting if there was accounting software that could assign profit-and-loss numbers to the following?

- 100 hours of ineffective prospecting and business development.
- 50 hours invested in speaking to the wrong decision maker.

- 200 hours wasted on appointments where the salesperson was unable to create an image of difference.
- 75 hours spent writing practice proposals.
- Total missed sales.

Then multiply those costs by 12 months.

Unfortunately this type of math is never calculated on the P&L. As a result, when companies trim budgets, they unknowingly trim revenue.

**2. Examine your marketing copy and your sales copy:** It's amazing how many industries don't pay attention to world events and the impact on human nature and emotion.

If you are in the financial planning industry, don't send a marketing piece that tells how you can invest money better than anyone else.

Be authentic and deal with the real questions on consumers mind: How the heck did almost everyone miss this downturn, resulting in a huge loss of wealth? Why didn't the age-old strategy of diversification work? The second question looming out there is: If some of the smartest investors in the world got misled by Bernard Madoff, who can you really trust?

In sales, we call it the unspoken objection, and it's the responsibility of the salesperson to bring up the objection and deal with it.

How about the mortgage and real estate industry? Please quit sending postcards with athletic schedules and recipes. (Who has time to cook?) Create marketing copy that addresses questions on the consumers mind: Have we hit the bottom or not? If not, what numbers still make sense to buy and sell? And of course, with all the credit scams being uncovered, can I trust you?

Now let's talk about sales copy. You know, the words that come out of the salesperson's mouth when a marketing activity generates an opportunity.

Often, the marketing copy and sales copy don't match. Marketing copy touts the company is different, cutting edge and thought leaders. The salesperson answers the phone or responds to an email with the same old same old: "We have expertise, good service, advanced technology ... a ... zzzz."

The sales copy is tired, puts the prospect to sleep, convinces the prospect to stay with an existing vendor or do nothing — the new competitor in the recession.

Get real on your marketing copy, and get smart on your sales copy.

**3. Right-size your sales team:** It's a buyer's market. Business owners and sales managers, take advantage of this time and evaluate your current sales team. There is a lot of good talent on the street. Look at your current team and grade on a scale of 1-10 on the following:

- **Passion** — These are the salespeople that don't turn it off at 5 p.m. They really love the company, the industry and the product. As a result, work isn't work, it's a calling, and it's a profession.

Passionate salespeople have their antenna up, always looking for new opportunities and ideas.

- **Work ethic** — A person can always do the work. These economic times may require more sales activity, learning new skills and work. It might be time see if the people on your team understand pay for performance. Most of my career has been straight commission, and a funny little thing called work always signed my paycheck.

- **Smarts** — The profile is changing for salespeople. The salesperson of the future must understand the business of business. Product knowledge and good questioning skills are expected; it doesn't make you outstanding.

Does your sales team know how to read a P&L? Are they reading The Wall Street Journal? Industry trade journals? Do they understand marketing and PR? The business of sales requires understanding business and their client's business.

The market has changed. Has your sales strategy?

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