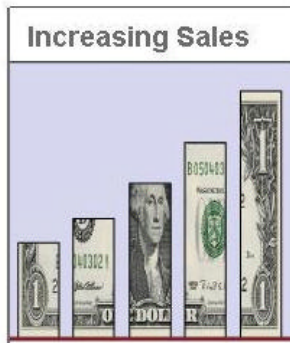


How to Use Reporting to Grow and Manage Your Business

Part I - 5 Ways Reporting Can Increase Sales



We all accept reporting as a means for management to evaluate business activity of one type or another. Reports provide management with the information and insights they need to formulate the “big picture” and make decisions.

Consider other potential values in reporting.

Reporting enables us to get “data” out of a database system. But did it ever occur to you to use reporting as a tool for getting information *into* it – let alone as a tactic for increasing sales activity. Here are five profitable reasons to use reporting:

1. Look Both Ways

The tendency is for reports to be requested by and written for management’s eyes. Management has plenty of good reasons to look at reports. But, there is the tendency to overlook the needs and benefits for providing salespeople with useful reports.

Reporting gives reps an efficient way to view:

- ◇ New leads/records in the database assigned to them
- ◇ Their sales pipeline organized in useful ways
- ◇ Paste due activities and leads in need of follow-up
- ◇ Useful market intelligence

Reporting presents sales reps with information, much of which they’ve entered, in formats that their CRM system’s screens can not. For example:

- Reporting makes it easier for them to focus on or find information.
- Reports help them to identify needs with a higher priority.
- Reporting also points out prospects, opportunities, and tasks which may have slipped through cracks in their scheduling.

When it comes to the need for reports, I say “look both ways” ... look at how management can use reports but don’t forget to look the other way, at salespeople’s needs.

2. Measuring Goals

The power and importance of goal setting is undeniable in sales. By the same token, what good are goals if we don’t measure our actual performance and compare it to our set goals? Reporting must come into play.

Each year, or maybe even quarterly, we set goals. Even though I believe it is mostly semantics, I prefer the term *goal* to the term *quota*. Either way, salespeople (and others) are held to certain expectations. Good salespeople hold themselves accountable, and are motivated to reach the goals they set for themselves.

In order for salespeople to determine where they stand in relation to their goals, they need to roll-up their results into a framework that enables them to draw a comparison to their goals. Reporting is the best means to do this.

Equipping salespeople with reports that allow them to evaluate themselves along the way as well as at the end of period empowers them. It puts them in more direct control of their destiny by providing them a feedback look which helps them to manage

their actions. Reports can guide them, as well as reinforce their efforts.

As a result, the goals they set are more compelling. They are also able to do more realistic goal setting and planning. In addition, they become more proficient at providing management with realistic and accurate information.

If you're going to set a sales or marketing goal, make sure you also put in place a report to track it!

3. Natural Competition

Competition is a natural motivating force. Harnessing this force is a very effective means for accomplishing results. Generally speaking, salespeople have personalities which are inclined to be more competitive. That's why sales managers design sales contests and give recognition awards to motivate salespeople to appeal to the natural competitiveness of their sales force.

Reporting is another effective means for leveraging competitiveness. And, it is a lot simpler and less expensive than many other tactics. Yet, it is often overlooked.

Supplying salespeople with reports which show reps their activity and ranking in contrast to their colleagues, as well as the industry, can stimulate competitive juices! For some inner directed, self-motivated salespeople, it can be enough just to show them how they are doing compared to their own personal performance.

4. Objective Judge

Since reporting is based on data, and data is mostly factual information, reporting can provide a viewpoint with very little bias.

I realize that this is not entirely true ... we've all seen how statistics can be used to support lies. Nonetheless, we should not view all reporting as bad because of a few "bad apples."

Of course with computers it is always a matter of GIGO (garbage in, garbage out). Nonetheless, what is "in" will come out and there's no denying that! So, if a salesperson doesn't like the fact of what is coming out they may only have themselves to blame. Some organizations take a very hard line on the problem of salespeople who fail to enter their activities, etc. – I've heard it said, "If it's not in the system, it didn't happen – so, you won't get credit for it!"

Surely reporting can be more objective than opinion. And, because reporting is based on the accumulation of many discrete entries, rather than one's recollection, it has the ability to be more accurate. Some facts are indisputable because they are captured automatically by the system and offer very low possibility for misinformation. For example, databases often automatically track when and who makes an entry. In addition, there are many pieces of data that no one would have a reason to lie about. For example, the address, or industry or who their current supplier is.

Reporting can roll up information and provide a more objective basis for conclusions and decisions. It can calculate trends and present analysis that people would simply not be able to accurately know any other way than reporting.

Therefore, when you want an objective answer to a question that a person may not have a way of knowing in the first place, ask your database by running a report!

5. Increase Selling Time

It's been said that, "Salespeople should sell, and everyone else should do everything else." The worst thing you can do to waste a salesperson's time is to ask them to give you reports on information that they've already taken the time to enter into the organization's central customer relationship management (CRM) system!

Shame on the manager who is so lazy that they ask the salesperson for information they could have reported on themselves. The salesperson has even fewer resources to design and create reports! And,

since they probably don't know how to generate the report for what the manager is asking for in the format they want it, they have to tediously go back over previously entered information and generate it manually in a word processor or spreadsheet. What a waste of their time! Plus, it undermines usage of your CRM system if management is not relying upon data the reps are entering.

Worse still is the fact that there may not even be a place in the database for the salesperson to store the information that is required for the reports. So, the rep has to resort to maintaining multiple systems to keep track of what's required. Management needs to anticipate the need for data collection and reporting, and to incorporate a way to house and capture this information in the system all the salespeople are using!

Reporting should not be a burden on salespeople's time. In fact, as discussed above, reporting should save salespeople time and help them to work more efficiently.

Conclusion

Reporting gives reps more time to sell, and helps them to focus their efforts in order to be more effective. Reporting sparks natural competitive feelings that help motivate reps. Plus, since reps can see the beneficial use of the information they enter, and are judged based on it, reporting even encourages reps to enter needed information into the system.

So now what? Now you need to decide what you should report on. There are all sorts of bellwethers that you can come up with which can be the basis for a fine report. In "Part II" of this article I will discuss this. In the meantime, do your own thinking. I'm sure you can come up with more ways to look at any situation than your report writers have time to handle. The key is to "begin with the end in mind" – to have a good use for the report. And, I can't think of a better use for reports than to increase sales!!

If you'd like to receive Part II of this article titled "Worth Reporting" or a personal demonstration of other ways technology can increase your selling time, email britter@1stdirect.com or visit www.1stdirect.com

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