

ARE YOUR SALESPEOPLE PROPERLY FOCUSED?

BY JOHN ASHER



Top salespeople spend their time focused on a few qualified top opportunities. *Focus is key*, as numerous studies have shown that it takes an average of twelve contacts to make a sale in typical business-to-business sales.

A contact can be a:

- Personal visit
- Telephone call
- E-mail exchange
- Instant messaging
- Personal note
- Voice mail message
- Text message
- Audio postcard (salesforceaudio.com)
- Copies of interesting articles
- Social engagements
- Direct mail
- Newsletters
- Broadcast email
- Special reports

The twelve contacts are measured from the recognition of a qualified opportunity until the close. Additionally, the Harvard Business School conducted a study and determined that an average of seven of the contacts must be quality contacts, such as:

- A face-to-face meeting
- An in-depth phone conversation
- An active electronic exchange via e-mail, instant message or text message

Average salespeople quit after just three contacts and move on to the next opportunity. The ability to focus and stay with a qualified opportunity until it closes defines top salespeople. There are four primary reasons why it takes up to twelve contacts to close a sale.

1. **Comfort Level/The Relationship**

It usually takes some time (perhaps two to three contacts) for the buyer to feel comfortable with the salesperson, the salesperson's organization and the products or services being offered.

2. **The Buyer's Decision-Making Process**

Most companies have a formal process for making purchasing decisions. There may be more than one buyer, timing issues or budget constraints. The salesperson may have to help the buyer get the necessary funds inserted in the buyer's subsequent year's budget, causing a delay.

3. **The Competition or Incumbent**

The buyer usually needs time to review offerings from the competition or the incumbent.

4. Other Priorities

The buyer may have other, more urgent, priorities. The solution being offered may solve the buyer's problem perfectly, but the problem may not be one of the buyer's highest priorities. The buyer might have "other stuff" that needs attention, which may delay the decision-making process.

Average salespeople do not understand these reasons behind closing delays and give up too easily. If you ask a top salesperson how many contacts they make on a qualified lead before they give up, they won't give you an answer! They will pursue a qualified buyer until the buyer "buys or dies."

Because of the need to make so many contacts to a given qualified lead, a top salesperson quickly learns to focus. Average salespeople make a few contacts to a lot of contacts. Top salespeople make a lot of contacts to a few top prospects.

The Focus Formula

Based on how long it takes your salespeople to make a contact, your average sales cycle time and the percentage of time your salespeople are actually selling, make a rough calculation of how many prospects your salespeople have time to touch twelve times during your selling cycle period. Here is an example for a business-to-business sale:

Assumptions

Average time spent making quality contacts is 60 minutes.

Average sales cycle time is six months.

National average for the % of time sales people actually sell (for complex sales) is 27%.

Average number of contacts made to a buyer before the close is 12.

Based on these figures, let's calculate how many qualified leads your salespeople should be pursuing.

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|-------|-----------|--|
| | 1,040 | work hours in a six-month sales cycle (assuming an eight-hour day) |
| x | 27% | percentage of workday spent actually selling |
| <hr/> | | |
| | 280 | "selling hours" |
| ÷ | 12 | contacts to close the sale |
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| | 23 | PROSPECTS TO FOCUS ON |

Make sure your salespeople are focusing on the correct number of prospects. If they are focusing on too few, there may be something wrong with the prospecting process - is it the salesperson or the company failing to obtain a sufficient number of qualified leads? If they have too many, they are not sufficiently focused - time for some coaching!

Meet with your salespeople once a week. Ask them for the status of their top prospects. Make sure those prospects are qualified leads. Ask how they have moved the sales process along during the previous week and what the next step is for each prospect. Keep the pressure on and keep them focused!