

Quota Busting Ideas for Selling Professional Services

Nine Steps for Creating a Superior Sales Force

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Take a look around. What are product sales managers and business owners hearing professionals from other companies talk about at industry trade shows? Progressive products and services companies are asking their colleagues about how to sell more professional services faster. Given the economic slow-down, organizations of all sizes are exploring innovative and creative ways to sell services. Even hard core medical companies are jumping into the services arena as customers demand more integration between medical equipment, systems, data, and patient care to be wrapped around their service promise. Software companies in particular are also trying to find new approaches to have more “feet on the street” exploring ways to transfer knowledge to their technical delivery consultants and entering into new sales co-sharing arrangements with channel partners.

Training sale professionals to sell services can be done successfully if the appropriate tools and techniques and strategies are put in place. It has been our experience working with numerous product companies and training them to sell services that the most important element of the transformation process lies with the tools and techniques that are learned. This coupled with focusing on the true differences between selling products and selling services (selling the invisible coupled with strong relationship skills) will be the deciding factor in whether an organization will reap the benefits of increased productivity and service sales or be mired down in wasted opportunity.

Keys to Success

Product sales and services management need to step back and take a 360-degree review of where its company stands. What changes must take place in the sales and development process? What new skills, knowledge, and mindsets must be put in place? How must the sales organization change in order to best support the entire selling team (products, services, and consultants?) Nine key success steps are required to create a superior sales force whose charter is to not only sell products, but also professional services.

1. Define What Is Required to Qualify Great Professional Services Business. Think of a current services prospect, which you believe may have potential for professional services to support existing products. Use the qualifying checklist shown in *Figure 1* for that organization to determine the likelihood of selling success to them over the next 90 days.

Figure 1

Professional Services Qualifying Checklist

Source: "The Ten Commandments for Selling Professional Services," Jim Alexander and Mark Hordes, *Professional Services Leadership Report*.

	<i>Low</i>			<i>High</i>	
1. Importance to the Customer	1	2	3	4	5
2. Business Fit	1	2	3	4	5
3. Personal Fit	1	2	3	4	5
4. Our Reputation with the Account	1	2	3	4	5
5. Account Partnership Attitude	1	2	3	4	5
6. Competitive Position	1	2	3	4	5
7. Access to the Decision Makers	1	2	3	4	5
8. Funding	1	2	3	4	5
9. Importance to Us	1	2	3	4	5
10. Timing	1	2	3	4	5

Total Score = _____

How did your opportunity score? A score of less than 35 should raise some red flags related to chasing this business. Focus your limited resources on high potential business and walk away from the rest.

2. Teach All Front Line Professionals Who Touch the Customer How to Sell the Invisible. Selling professional services in support of product sales is not about features and functions; negotiating about price and delivery; or handling objections. It's really about trust, experience, talent, scope of the work, and understanding the totality of your customer's business.

Whatever the title, consultant, customer engineer, or services technician, all members of the organization who have contact with customers can increase their value to their company by taking an active role in business development.

Wouldn't you place a bet with a company where everyone is trained to promote new business? We think so, and so do many top-performing businesses that know the potential of providing sales training for their delivery professionals and the sales force. These companies typically choose to operate at level 5 or 6 on the following business development continuum.

3. The Six Business Development Levels of the Technical Support Organization:

- (a) Focus on meeting project delivery objectives and leaving all business development tasks to client sales.
- (b) When the client mentions potential opportunities, communicate them to client sales.
- (c) Actively look and listen for client opportunities then pass them on to client sales.
- (d) Actively look and listen for client opportunities, qualify the client need, then pass them on to client sales.
- (e) Actively look, listen, and research client opportunities, qualify the need, and work with client sales to develop proposal.
- (f) Actively look, listen, and research client opportunities, qualify the need, develop proposal, and present to client.

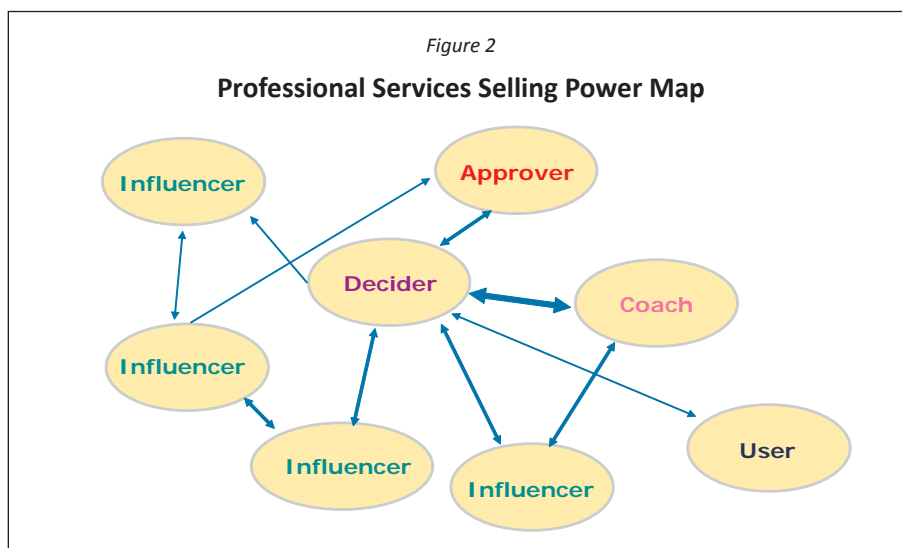
Organizations operating at level 5 or 6 do the most to leverage their selling potential and, not surprisingly, they outperform those organizations with less emphasis on business development. What level is your organization at today? What will it take to move it up?

4. Amplify the Voice of the Professional Services Customer. A little knowledge can be dangerous, but being able to define which customers just want quality and delivery as well as good response time is different than a customer that wants innovation and partnership. Defining how your existing customer base can and should be segmented will help marketing and services support sales come closer to hitting a home run and closing the deal. How do your existing customers and prospects segment? Do you know not only what they want, but also what they will pay for?

5. Understand What It Takes to Be a Superior Professional Sales Salesperson. Required competencies to reach this goal include: a professional services mind set, the ability to clarify complex customer issues, skills in communicating the benefits of intangibles, insight on how to customize each solution, skills in compressing the sales cycle and how to commercialize the services sales promise. Which skills and capabilities do your sales people possess today? And which will they need to acquire in the future?

6. Build Skills in Relating to Different “C” Level Services Personalities. If your professional services are important to the organization you are trying to sell, then you will have middle management’s attention. If your professional services potentially address a critical business issue, then you are in the realm of the “C” level. These folks think and act differently than the normal buyers of products, and hence must be sold differently as well. Selling approaches that may be highly successful in influencing managers often are totally inappropriate in gaining the trust and commitment of senior executives. Anyone walking into the board room must have an adequate level of business acumen, a clear understanding of the prospect’s operation, culture, and priorities, and appropriate knowledge of the issues, wants, and needs of the senior people involved in the decision.

7. Map Out the Sales Battle Field. Targeting a key account requires not only selling the invisible, but also defining where the power is in the customer’s organization. A picture is worth a thousand words and the use of a Sales Power Map (*Figure 2*) outlines not only who the key decision makers are but also her advisors, coaches, and influencers. Using this technique will help you close more business because you are more focused and aligned as to how and to whom you are selling. Does your sales team know all the players and how they relate to one another?



8. Align the Sales Environment to Maximize Performance. Keep in mind that alignment and balance are critical elements to maximizing performance. A great sales force will eventually fall behind if the sales environment is not supportive. Elements such as fitting the performance specifications, adequate resources, minimal interference, consequence management, and quality feedback all help to support your sales organization sell. How well does your system support your sales force?

9. Just Do It! Most product sales professionals and even the management will get very nervous when you start talking about taking the guys out of the field for several days of training. Some may even suggest perhaps just giving them a CD and a workbook and let them loose. Forget it! Effective professional services sales training requires practice, role plays, self-assessments and interaction in a safe environment where you can fail miserably but yet rise to the occasion and close the deal in the field where it really counts.

Final Thoughts

Product companies are entering a period of transition. The winners in tomorrow's race will be companies that differentiate themselves from those that simply seek parity in the marketplace from those that become the dominant players by training everyone with top of the line professional services sales skills. Understanding and learning how to sell professional services will be not only be the challenge but the reward as well.

Generating new profitable revenue is the business mantra of today, and professional services can be a great contributor. Invest in the steps above to maximize your selling potential, and you'll start reaping the rewards.

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